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MY LADY GREEN SLEEVES BY HELEN MATHERS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

"CHERRY RIPE!" . . . . . 2 vols.
"LAND O' THE LEAL" . . . 1 vol.

MY LADY GREEN SLEEVES.

BY

HELEN MATHERS,

AUTHOR OF "CHERRY RIPE!" "LAND O' THE LEAL," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1879.

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MY LADY GREEN SLEEVES.

CHAPTER I.

"The light upspringeth, the dew down dingeth,
The sweet lark singeth her hours of prime;
Phœbus up-spenteth joy to rest wenteth,
So lost is mine intent and gone is the time."

YOICKS!

Away we go with the morning wind full in our faces, and taking the low stone wall before us, top it easily and together, crossing the meadow abreast, and rising to the ditch beyond in a faultless line of five.

Down the gradual descent to the valley, now braided with shining waters, breasting the steep ascent of the hill beyond, and so to the hamlet churchyard on its summit, across which we tread lightly and in silence, though it would take a louder Tantivvy than any our leader has blown to-day to awaken those who sleep below.

On the uplands the wild March wind comes tearing up, and wrestles with, and would slay us on

our path, but, like blades of corn, we bow before it, sweeping gaily on with our ranks as yet unbroken.

The wind has other work to do than to hinder to-day, for with his mighty besom he is sweeping, tidying, setting in order and making ready the earth against the great high festival of the year.

Like a rude but willing lover he speeds before, shouldering aside the mists and the snow, scattering the *débris* of the dead season to the skies, stirring the sap in the kings of the forest, and with his boisterous caress surprising and giving to the air those faint and subtle scents that lurk in a million folded buds, and opening shapes of beauty.

For on the lulls that follow on his stormy outbreaks, one may hearken to and taste heaven's very breath and whisper, as it airily comes and goes through the tree-tops, or passes like a sigh through the hedgerows, and across the meadows, and the life in one will swell and glow for joy of it; and we thank God for what we are, not for what we have, or may be.

Yoicks!

We are no longer in a line of five, and the ten acre ploughed field that our leader has selected with a view to testing our wind and muscle, finds out our weak members, so that only two of us reach and scramble over the hedge abreast.

But the smell of the earth, fresh turned, is good; we sniff up great draughts of it, the sort of physic that, for the folks who live shut up in cities, there's nothing better, unless it's an oak tree fresh peeled. "I'm *blowed!*" says a female voice, in tones of tragedy behind us; but though we sympathize with the speaker we only nod and smile silently, for if we spoke, we should be in case like unto hers, the first word uttered by either being equivalent to a confession that though the spirit is willing, the wind is short.

We want our breath for going, not talking; when work of any sort has to be done a still tongue is better than a wagging one.

"Primroses!" cries another female voice, some five minutes later, and straightway Jill drops out of the race, and down on her knees beside a pale clump in the hedge, and worships it.

Anak, who has been keeping himself severely in hand in consideration of the feminine legs striving to keep up with him, here lets himself go, and settling into a colossal stride, vanishes in the distance with our nimble Squiffer tripping up his heels.

"O, Dick!" cries Jill, plucking her treasures one by one, "stop with me—we will go through the woods and look for violets."

"All right," I say, coming back. "But I hope

you're not going to talk *worries*, Jill; that for an hour you'll try and forget that we've got stomachs, and all that."

"I'll try, Dick," says Jill, stifling a sigh.

"And that you haven't got a sock in your pocket to mend. I say, we'll just be souls for a bit, not bodies. Come along."

After a long search, we came upon our violets, a patch blue as heaven, the only sign of spring visible in the wood to one who knows not how to read between the lines.

To us, who know it all by heart, are visible a thousand delicate footmarks around us, and already we seem to see the white sail of the wind-flower set to the breeze, while trooping across the sward through the shadow-dance of the stripling leaves, come the saucy cuckoo flower, the blue bell, and all the pretty courtiers who serve to swell the woodland court.

I close my eyes, and there seems to come to me the long low murmur, the multitudinous hum of insect, birds, and creeping life, that in full spring and summer time is the breathing out in prayer of the forest, and I open them again with a start to see that the boughs are leafless, that Jill is surreptitiously cobbling at a sock, while her carefully-gathered violets lie disregarded at her feet.

"I thought you were off in one of your moons,"

she says, putting it away and rubbing her forehead against my shabby coat. "It has been a good morning, Dick, hasn't it?"

"We shall have better," I answer, thinking of the lengthening days.

"Dick," she says presently, "would you think it possible for us to be *worse* off than we are now?"

"Quite impossible."

"The very scarecrows in the fields are not more disreputable-looking than we are!"

"We're about even in looks. But they earn a penny a day—we don't."

"And they get a bit of bread and cheese to eat —don't they, Dick?"

"Yes; and once in a way a bit of fat bacon. But so do we."

"Can't we hire ourselves out as scarecrows to-morrow, Dick?" says Jill wistfully; "because, if not, we shall be—hungry."

"What!" I cry, starting back; "you don't mean to say—"

Jill nods, and her nod means—starvation.

The sun has got behind a cloud, the March wind rushes up into our faces with a sharp sting, keen as that bitter-tasting ill, Poverty; and afar off in the but now azure sky I seem to see the storm rack

rolling up, just as over our lives gathers, blacker every moment in its intensity, the cloud of Ruin.

"Let us go home," I say, standing up; "it is going to rain; and why couldn't you have left your sock behind, Jill, and for just five minutes have persuaded yourself that you were a real scarecrow, actually earning the handsome competence of a whole penny a day?"

CHAPTER II.

"The lily-white sall be your smock,
It becomes your bodie best;
Your head sall be busk't wi' gilly flower,
Wi' the primrose in your breast."

SOME of us are leaning through the open school-roomwindow looking at the big pear tree that has elected in a single night to burst into bloom, and now shows a wall of living snow at the end of the long arcade of the espalier walk.

The only moving object within sight is Anak, who flits hither and thither on his stilts, intent on certain bird-snaring operations to be put in force to-night.

"If you please, Miss Jill," says cook's voice from the door, "would you mind stepping into the kitchen for a minute?"

Drawing our heads in suddenly, two of them meet in a sounding crack, which speaks volumes for the emptiness of both, and as we ruefully rub them, Jill's rosy cheek pales, and her breath comes a little short.

"*Higgins!*" she says, and her anxious blue eyes seek mine.

"I'll go with you, old girl," I say, putting my arm round her—"come along, and let's get it over."

"What's up?" says Anak, stooping down and peeping in at the window, having apparently smelt disaster from afar.

"Higgins!" says Jill for the second time, much as though she were saying, "The Last Day."

Making a sheer descent of from ten feet to five-and three-quarters, Anak takes the window in his stride, and stands in our midst. "Just let him dare to cheek you," he says, scowling ferociously, "and *I'll* show him. Besides" (he pats Jill heavily on the back) "don't forget that the Chancellor of the Exchequer comes o' Monday!"

Thus supported, Jill sets out, the younger ones following after, down the passage, across the hall, and so to the kitchen.

Flinging the kitchen-door wide, our eyes involuntarily turn to the table. Alas! instead of being piled with goodly sirloin and comely leg of mutton, it is bare; while the fire, O dismal portent, is out.

We heartily wish *we* were, as there slowly emerges from behind the open door (surely in our abrupt entry we must have squeezed him against the wall), a burly man in a blouse, who scrapes his foot, pulls a forelock to us generally, and clears his throat preparatory to speaking.

"I've called, young ladies and gents," he says, "for a trifle off that little account of mine as have been running this two year. The best of j'ints served regler as the clock and plenty of 'em—and which you'll excuse me, young ladies and gents, but *all that*" (he eyes reproachfully the ruddy countenances, the stalwart bodies arrayed before him), "weren't reared upon nothing!"

We look down upon our mighty limbs with a sensation of shame; never, never shall we be able to take any pride in them again, or regard them as our own, for did not Higgins feed them—*ergo*, are they not his?

"And which, saving your presence, young ladies," said Higgins, seeing the effect he has produced, and warming to his subject, "but not one of my beast-esses is in such prime condition as you be, and if I'd only got 'arf of what it cost to rear them calves o' yourn, I should be pretty well able to shut up shop by now."

"At all events," says Hetty, deprecatingly, "you can't deny that we do your *j'ints* credit!"

"Or that father paid you regularly for years and years," puts in Jill.

"He did," said Mr. Higgins solemnly; "my cart weren't more regler in stopping at your door, than

he were in his payments—but times is changed, and changed for the wuss."

"Why don't you write to *him*?" I say, nodding towards a distant part of the house; "he pays the bills—we don't."

"Oh! he do, do he, sir?" says Higgins, with a contortion of the face presumably intended to express sarcasm; "it's the fust time as ever I heerd on't. I've wrote to him till my elbers has ached, and I've called on him, but he 'pears to have lost the use of his fingers, and ain't never at 'ome 'cepting to eat his dinner, judgin' by the number of sweetbreads and sich, as 'is stuck-up wally is for everlastin' a hordering."

"Why don't he come out like a man?" goes on Higgins, waxing warm and squaring pugilistically: "and if he can't pay, *say so*, 'stead of getting behind all you young ladies and gentlemen's backs, as ain't got nothink to do with it? And if you'll only say the word, miss" (to Jill), "I'll ust make so bold as to find my way to that part of the 'ouse where he 'ides himself like a mole, and 'ave the matter *hout*?"

A vision of Higgins having it out with our parent tickles me into inextinguishable laughter. But Jill does not laugh.

"It would do no good," she says; "besides,

Marshall would not admit you. No, no, you must come again on Tuesday, and between now and then we will see what can be done."

"And meanwhile," says Hetty, coaxingly, "couldn't you, dear, good, kind Mr. Higgins, send us a little bit of roast beef for dinner to-morrow? How would you like to have to go to church twice in one day, hungry, and with *him*?"

"And what a pity," says Anak, with a prodigious wink, "after getting us into such prime condition, to let us, for want of a sirloin or two, come down to *nothing!*"

"Sorry to seem 'ard-'arted, miss," says Higgins, hardening himself resolutely against pretty Hetty—"but I can't do it. And there's one comfort, miss" (he grins broadly), "that if you're 'ungry, *he*'ll be 'ungry too—and p'r'aps 'twill bring un to his senses. And you'll 'scuse me, young ladies and gents all—but you'll stand a goodish bit of bringing down, and"—backing to the door—"I'll call again o' Tuesday," and so departs hastily, fearing his feelings may be worked upon, leaving us literally and metaphorically a heap of ruins.

"We shall be *dead* by Tuesday!" cries Hetty, falling into a chair.

"Let us go and look in the larder!" says Anak,

practically; and, picking ourselves up as best we may, we follow him.

Alas! it is bare as the kitchen table, and our hearts sink into our boots as we gaze around.

"Hurrah!" cries the Squiffer, dipping his nose into the bread-pan, "here are three large loaves, *stale*—they'll go further than new ones——"

"And here's a pound of butter, and a rind of cheese," says Anak, who has been prowling about, and now returns triumphant.

Three loaves, a pound of butter, a rind of cheese, barely enough for *one*, to last six hungry people three days!

"And a piece of fat bacon," says Hetty, who has also been foraging, and now advances with her treasure-trove.

Bacon! It gives us an idea—simultaneously there bursts upon us the beatific vision of—

"Pig!" and we all, save Jill, shout his name in one breath.

"I've thought of that," says Jill, "but it's too late to kill him to-day—and to-morrow's Sunday; we can't, by any possibility, eat *him* till next week."

We relapse into despair, Hetty taking a seat on the bread-pan.

"If only," she says, "the Chancellor of the Exchequer had turned up to-day — but unavoidable

engagements have postponed *that* visit till Monday! Where's cook?"

"Exercising her utmost fascinations on the baker's man," says the Squiffer, who has been to reconnoitre; "at one time she seemed likely to win, but the issue, when I left, was doubtful. Here she comes!"

She does, and—empty-handed.

"O, cook!" cries Jill, in despair, "couldn't you persuade him to leave us anything?"

"No, Miss Jill, I couldn't," says cook, "and what's more, he says he ain't going to call again till his account's settled."

"Is there any other little trifle?" I inquire politely; "if so, pray don't be afraid to mention it."

"Only that if Higgins *had* left the meat," says cook, "'wouldn't have been of much use, for there's no coal; the last bit was used this morning to get breakfast."

"Is that all?"

"The maids are upstairs packing their boxes, Mr. Dick. When the butcher brought no meat this morning they said they didn't mean to stop here and be starved—so they're off, and they're going to sue master in the county court for their wages."

"Where's Marshall?" I enquire; "has any one seen him this morning?"

"He just looked in for a minute when Higgins came," says cook, "then off he went, and I haven't seen him since."

"Hark!" cries Anak, suddenly; "isn't that somebody driving out of the courtyard?"

We all rush to a distant grating, and peep. There, sure enough, is the fine gentleman's gentleman driving off in style, with (significant omen!) a large basket beside him.

"Gone to the market-town to get wittles for *him*," says Kitty, with conviction. "It's to be hoped he won't forget some coals to cook 'em with."

"Let's waylay him on his return," says Anak, brightening. "*I'll* hold him while you empty the basket. He's helped himself often enough to our goods, why shouldn't we help ourselves to his?"

"Dick! Hetty! Anak!" cries Jill, wheeling suddenly round; "he must have got money, *ready money*, or he couldn't have sent Marshall out marketing; and he's there all alone, entirely at our mercy —and—I mean to pay him a visit."

We gasp as with one breath: Jill has, indeed, eclipsed us all. Never in our wildest moments have we dreamed of bringing him to book, any more (we may be sure) than has *he*. Jill must be joking; besides, she is asserting herself pretty well for a girl, and no mistake.

"Don't talk stuff," I say decidedly. "If any one takes him to task *I* must; you're only a girl, and of course he won't listen to you."

"What came of your appeal to him last time?" cries Jill, facing round upon me; "you've had your turn, now it's mine. If you like to come in as chorus, you can. Who follows?" and she sweeps me aside like chaff (where can she have learned that imperial gesture?) on her way to the door. Chorus, indeed! we shall see.

Astonished, delighted, incredulous, the young ones set off at Jill's heels, Hetty and I following more soberly, and cook bringing up the rear. Traversing the hall, and a passage or two, we come presently to the padded door that shuts off *his* apartments from the rest of the house, and whence he rarely issues, save on Sundays, or to drive or ride.

Seldom indeed do we pass this portal, and then but singly, and when summoned; but now, Jill's blood being up, she pushes it open without a moment's hesitation, and we all follow.

The carpet is so soft that our feet, hardened by a long course of matting, seem to sink into it; not for years have we unitedly walked so softly. The very handle of the second door, too, turns without a sound —Jill disdains to knock—and in another moment we are in the presence of the master of the house.

CHAPTER III.

"And now, since we're going before the king,
Lord, we will go most gallantlie!"

A SCENT of lilies of the valley; a suspicion of dried lavender; a subdued glow of landscapes on the walls; a conservatory beyond with flowers just brightening into delicate life; a Straduarius laid down upon an open page of music; a pleasant litter of cut and uncut books and magazines; on all sides the tokens of cultured and refined understanding that are in entire keeping with the delicate hand supporting the head that is turned away from us. I suppose we have senses like other folks, though we've small chance of indulging them; at any rate we pause for a moment on the threshold, forgetting all about its occupant, simply drawing in the perfume and the harmony before us.

Although we did not hear the lock turn, apparently his perception of hearing is keener than ours, for before Jill can utter a syllable, he speaks.

"Is that you, Marshall?" he says: "I was afraid you had gone, and I had forgotten one or two things: the *caviare*, Marshall, and the olives—we

are quite out of olives—but I dare say you would have remembered them. And don't be late; I think I could eat a little bit of Strasbourg pie for my luncheon, with a glass of Madeira—though, by the way, the Madeira is getting low, unpleasantly low."

A pause. Apparently he is accustomed to bows, not verbal answers from his man, for he does not turn his head, or appear surprised.

"I am not quite the thing to-day," he goes on in a gently complaining tone; "that *fricassée* of chicken disagreed with me last night, and perhaps the sweetbreads stewed in cream were a little too rich—I am inclined, however, to blame the *fricassée*, I have very grave suspicions that it was *not* made from the fowl which I ordered you to have killed, it having struck me as being so remarkably plump—but possibly its sister, or its cousin, or its aunt."

O! ye gods! has he verily and indeed, frittered and wasted into a miserable *fricassée* the fat body, the savoury juices, of our very last barndoor fowl, when we would have frugally eaten him by inches, and picked every individual bone of him bare?

If this goes on much longer we shall explode—simultaneously.

"And I have been upset," he continues plaintively, "by the scandalous conduct of the man *Higgins*. I suppose he will come to his senses in

a day or two, meanwhile it is awkward and—expensive. However, I think we shall be able to manage a decent luncheon for Colonel Desart on Monday; the cooking under your tuition is fair, very fair; and the cook is really a most estimable woman—except in the matter of always wanting her wages."

A snort from Kitty at the door should awaken him to a realization of his position, but he evidently attributes it to Marshall; and this must surprise him, as that gentleman is usually a perfect model of good breeding.

"You can go now," he says, languidly, "but surely you have left the swing-door open? I feel a *draught*, a very perceptible draught, down my neck. Take care those young savages don't waylay you on your return, they're quite capable of it—not," he adds, with a fine sneer in his voice, "that I think they would appreciate *caviare!*"

That sneer sends our blood up to boiling-point; but Jill, who has steadily been getting ahead of everybody ever since she got up this morning, explodes first.

"You are right, sir," she says, advancing, "we are not accustomed to such delicacies; neither are we at all afraid of our food being too *rich*, for we have none—therefore the savages have called upon

you to-day to ask for some money with which to procure it, some of their *own* money, sir, that you have been so kindly taking care of for them."

The lily-white hand supporting the smooth head, so smooth as to suggest a wig, is removed. Turning more rapidly than he has probably ever turned in his life before, there faces us our latest parent—Mr. Josiah Titmarsh. Our parent, ay; but is he responsible for us? Are we Titmarshes? Heaven forbid! We may be handsome, or the reverse, but *no one* could look us in the face and believe us to have disgraced ourselves with such a father; we should never have held up our heads again had we done such a thing.

As his eye falls on our stalwart, shabby ranks, on our too palpable legs, and Smikelike garments, he involuntarily closes his eyes, and—shudders.

"My nerves," he murmurs gently.

"Yes," says Jill, heartlessly. "*You* have nerves, *we* have bodies; and bodies are vulgar, sir, while nerves are aristocratic, and they require to be *fed*."

He slowly opens his eyes, as one who seeks to accustom himself by degrees to some necessary but displeasing spectacle, his gaze gradually settling upon Hetty, as being the least rudely healthy-looking, and warlike of the lot.

"Good morning, Hetty," he says; "you are look-

ing very pretty to-day. And, dear me—you are standing—everybody is standing; pray sit down everybody. And surely I see that very excellent person, Kitty, standing near the door? I have given my orders to Marshall for the day—you can close the door, Mrs. Kitty. Stay! In case Marshall should forget to mention it, the melted butter last night was not *quite* the thing—it should be thick, but not *too* thick. You will remember in future, I am sure. Good morning, Mrs. Kitty."

Alas! for the courage that falters on the brink of battle; the door closes upon her—vanquished.

"And now," says Mr. Titmarsh, rising, "is there anything that I can do for you to-day, Hetty?"

He had better have sat down; a little man sitting, may be as dignified as a big one, but standing up, the master of our destinies is hardly as big as the Squiffer, which *may* account (I don't say it does) for the immunity his wardrobe has hitherto enjoyed at our hands.

"You can give us some money, sir," says Hetty, blushing (surely it is he who should blush, not Hetty) "for I should like a new bonnet—O! very much indeed!"

I wonder how he has acquired his wonderful knack of invariably putting us into the wrong—himself in the right? It is for *him* to stammer, to look

ill at ease, to make excuses; yet why, in every encounter we have with him, do we feel ourselves to be mannerless, uncouth bumpkins? It must be his eye-glass, or his white hand, or his sneer, or all three together.

But to-day they fail in their wonted effect upon Jill, who has indeed taken the bit between her teeth with a vengeance. I have noticed that when the Devil takes possession of a girl he doesn't leave her in a hurry, as he does a man—he stops.

"We want money, sir," she says, standing forth as champion, superbly indifferent to such trifling details as short petticoats, bare arms, and the most venerable boots the family owns, "and money we must have; though not for bonnets, sir, or luxuries such as you have here, but to pay Higgins, and to buy—*bread*."

She holds out her hand—open; but Mr. Titmarsh, who has re-seated himself, does not see it.

"Marshall has really behaved extremely well," he says, settling his eye-glass; "it seems he had saved up a few pounds at his former place, and when he found out in how unpleasant a position I was placed by the behaviour of—ah—Higgins, he insisted on purchasing certain necessaries out of his own funds for me. I shall of course be most happy to make you sharers in them."

"Savages, sir," cuts in Jill, ruthlessly, "especially *hungry* savages, prefer a plain joint to luxuries; and you needn't be afraid of our depriving you of yours, or of waylaying Marshall on his return. It has never been in our line to help ourselves to other people's goods; we leave that to people who can appreciate *caviare*, sir, and olives."

"What do you wish?" he says, stung out of his composure at last, and actually meeting, for a moment, Jill's indignant, flashing young eyes with his own.

"We would like to know, sir, what has become of all the money father left us, and that you, as our second step-father, have the charge of—money, sir, to put the boys into professions, to provide marriage portions for the girls, and to educate us: sixty thousand pounds in all, and Sieviking Court; surely, sir, you cannot have got rid of it *all?*"

He makes no reply, only I think the hand that is adjusting his eye-glass trembles slightly.

"Sixty thousand pounds," repeats Jill; "not overmuch to divide between a family of ten, but enough at any rate to send us to school, and to feed and clothe us. Look at this!" and by way of practical illustration, and before that hapless youth has the faintest notion of her intention, she has caught Anak

by the coat-collar and deftly spun him round within a few inches of Mr. Titmarsh's nose.

Indeed, he is worth looking at. Hercules, not quite arrived at his full stature, and arrayed in a coat whose tails defiantly spurn his waist; knickerbockers, tweed as to the countenance, check as to the wake; knees that boldly appear through his stockings, and boots whose upper and under soles have long ceased to be on speaking terms, *may* have made a handsome spectacle, but it is quite certain that Anak, who, in physique, strongly resembles that personage, doesn't.

"*Oh! I say!*" he cries angrily, as on reaching the end of his involuntary spin, he twists himself free, "you *are* going it, Jill, and no mistake!"

At sound of his Boreas-like voice, Mr. Titmarsh winces, and looks around uneasily, as though expecting the walls to come about his ears.

"And look at *that!*" cries the irrepressible Jill (really we all seem to be puppets in her hands to-day), dragging poor Hetty forward, short-frocked, tight-bodied, ill-shod, her charms all too many for their shell, and giving her a twirl that compels her to execute a semi-obeisance—"*Miss Sieviking*, sir, of Sieviking, at your service!"

He surveys Hetty thoughtfully—possibly it is occurring to him for the first time how far more

worthy of his regard she would be if she were properly dressed.

"So much for the money spent upon our clothes," says Jill, relinquishing her sister. "As to our food, what we have been eating for the last year is a present to us from the tradespeople, for they have not been paid a farthing during that time. And as to the education" (really Jill is like the brook that goes on for ever), "we have had none save what we got in father's and Mr. Trevelyan's time. The boys have been sent to no public schools, trained to no professions, allowed to run wild; and what is the result? Poor Will and Kit have fallen into bad ways and gone abroad; the last time we heard of them, Will was earning his bread by breaking in wild horses, and Kit was digging for gold, and—" ("Finding nothing but *coal!*" interpolates Anak.) "the rest of us are growing up idle and do nothing—we are rough and ignorant beyond belief; and whose fault is it? The fault of those who have robbed us of our inheritance!"

"Just so," says Mr. Titmarsh, with astonishing spryness, "*those* who have robbed you—you do well to use the plural. Pray how many persons had the handling and entire control of your money before I came to Sieviking? And how are you to prove that the whole of that money had not been run through before I married Mrs. Trevelyan?"

He is speaking in earnest now, and showing his fangs.

"But—but," says Jill, gasping, "it is only since *you* came that money has become scarce, that our education has been neglected, that nearly all the servants have been discharged, and the whole establishment reduced. Both in Mr. Trevelyan's time and Madam's we were well clothed and cared for—"

"And the butcher called regularly twice a week!" puts in Anak, as a clincher.

"Just so," says Mr. Titmarsh, with a smile that infuriates us. (O Jill! Jill! that unfortunate *plural* of yours.) "When I came here things were conducted in a lavish, not to say in a royal, manner, that was positively ruinous. The person then in authority (my late wife) was permitting a style of living entirely beyond your means, and in your interests I felt it my duty to retrench, and have indeed devoted my whole energies to saving you from utter ruin."

"That is a lie, sir!" I cry, striding forward, "and you know it. Our estate was entirely unimpaired when you married poor Madam; things only began to go wrong from the day when *you* set foot in Sieviking."

Mr. Titmarsh turns his eye-glass full on me (he

has long since re-seated himself), looks at me a moment, then drops it.

"Ah, *Dick!*" he says slightly. And what can there be in his tone to reproduce my appearance to my own eyes with as much distinctness as though a long glass swung before me?

"Yes—Dick," I say stoutly, "the head of the family in the absence of his elder brothers, and now for the first time about to exercise that authority. For the last time, sir, either can't you, or won't you find the money to pay the household bills, and provide for the current expenses of the family?"

"I have no money," says Mr. Titmarsh, spreading out his white hands and shrugging his shoulders; "as I was explaining to you just now—Marshall——"

"That will do, sir," I say, cutting him short. "You picked a quarrel with our lawyer very soon after you came here, and appointed your own; but to-day I shall write to Mr. Pitt, asking him as a favour to *us* to come at once and examine into everything—he knows the estate thoroughly. And though hitherto we have been too proud to complain to our relations, who are ashamed enough of us already, things are getting too bad to be hidden much longer, and at the same time I shall write to our

unmarried aunt requesting her to come here and meet him."

"Pray do," says Mr. Titmarsh, politely, "your aunt invariably—amuses me."

"Meanwhile, sir, we will leave you to the enjoyment of the delicacies you are able to procure out of your pilferings, and we beg to wish you a very good morning."

"Ta-ta," he says, smiling and waving his hand; "I am very pleased to have seen you all—especially Hetty. Will you come and dine with me, my dear, to-morrow? Not that I should advise you to eat more than a very small quantity of anything—a stewed lark, say, or a cutlet—for you require fining down; indeed, whether from gross, or over feeding, there is not the smallest doubt that, pretty as you are, you run a terrible risk, my poor Hetty, of growing too—*fat!*"

Not as conquering heroes do we reach the door. Once outside it, we look at each other, divided between wrath and laughter. We may get lawyers, aunts, relatives by the dozen—any vulgar people can do that; but *he* gets the last word.

"Nerves, has he?" says Anak, darkly, as he shakes his fist at the closed door; "just you wait a bit, and see if I don't make him *feel* 'em."

CHAPTER IV.

"Your gloves sall be the marigold,
All glittering to your hand;
Weel spread owre wi' the blue blaewort
That grows amang cornland."

It is Sunday morning, and with all the strength of our bodies and souls we are wishing that it were Monday. On a Monday it is lawful to slay a beast; on a Monday it is not necessary to keep up appearances; on a Monday a high personage who does not travel o' Sundays, such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, may be expected to arrive; on a Monday there is no long sermon to whet appetites that are naturally fine. On Sunday mornings we make the one supreme effort of the week to appear *respectable;* and if we have hitherto found it hard work when we had breakfasted well, and were looking forward to the sirloin of beef, and Yorkshire pudding that formed our invariable Sunday dinner, it may be easily supposed that the effort to-day is doubled.

There has been a grand darning of stockings and smallclothes over night, and for once our knees blush unseen, but as a rule we seek to embellish

the upper parts of our persons most, as we sit in a square pew in church, and our legs are not visible. *Getting* into church is the rub; once there, we draw a long breath, and are thankful.

Anak, as usual, dips his head into a basin of cold water, and carefully combs his hair down in locks over his eyes; ties up his boots with inked string, and puts the biggest nosegay that he can get for the time of year in the place where a buttonhole ought to be, but isn't. There is one striking merit about that nosegay—it distracts attention from the rest of his person; and the eye that is once smitten by it rarely travels any further.

Solomon and the Squiffer make a fine display of clean collar and a handkerchief a piece, with faces and hands to match.

The girls, from some occult recess, produce *tails*, and—one pair of lavender kid gloves between them. Sometimes one has the right, sometimes the left, but neither ever arrives at the dignity of both at once.

When we are all ready, we betake ourselves to the hall as usual—more from habit, than any expectation of *his* appearing. Common decency will surely prevent his attempting to look either of us in the face this morning.

On one day of the week only, may we confidently reckon on the light of Mr. Titmarsh's countenance;

it is when, in the character of model and suffering step-father, he heads our procession to church, and earns the admiration, respect, and pity of the whole congregation for the exquisite manner in which he performs his duty.

For people who look at him—and us—regard him as the patient, conscientious, persecuted man, upon whom is step-fathered a scapegrace, troublesome pack, whose one aim and object is to reduce him to an untimely grave, in the same way as we are popularly supposed to have polished off "the other ones;" and in face of our blooming countenances, and mighty frames, decline to believe that we are badly served by him, or anybody else; on the contrary, it is *he* who is ridden over by us, rough shod.

Perhaps if *we* had brims to our hats, and tails to our coats, and were fed on *purées* and sweetbreads, *we* should look refined and patient, and interesting, but I rather doubt it; I'm inclined to think they would only make us look hungry. And he has manners, we have none. And manners are better than birth, money, good looks, talent—anything.

"We may as well go on," says Anak, in his fine, loud bellow; "he's ashamed to come out, and no wonder——"

Is he though? Here he comes, with a hat in his hand so shiny that, at a pinch, we may behold ourselves and our many imperfections in it, with a flower in his buttonhole, a coat that Poole may well be proud of, with legs of a delicate grey, and gloves to match, no two vagrant ones that may be yours to-day and mine to-morrow, but a Pair.

Have we wronged him after all, and is the amiable "good morning" with which he greets us, another instance of long-suffering charity or sublime hypocrisy?

We mutter something in reply, whether good or bad is not clearly audible; then (the usual Sunday morning formula): he holds forth his hand, Hetty advances, and stepping out together, they lead the van.

Now, why does our elder sister thus make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness? Simply and solely from the force of a habit that, in its old age, like many other iniquitous things, has become respectable.

Every Saturday night of her life, Hetty vows that she will not, in the face of the village, walk thus amicably hand-in-hand with him; and every Sabbath-day morning of the year he holds out his hand, and she—takes it. They make a beautifully filial

spectacle, entering the church side by side, and he knows it.

It is a good step thither, and on the road Anak is harassed by fears that the upper parts alone of his boots will reach church, but fate is good to us, inasmuch as we reach that bourne in safety, and presently march in single file, admirably adapted to hide our deficiencies, up the aisle, behind Hetty's tail, that, whisking the dust from the memory of John Stodge and Mary his wife, causes their virtues to unexpectedly shine refulgent.

It occurs to me for the first time as I follow my brethren, that any stranger seeing us enter, and Mr. Titmarsh heading us, might suppose him to be accountable for us. If so, and he knows it, what exquisite pangs must be his, when he sees any new eye fall upon our shabby, robust ranks!

The way in which he hands Hetty her ancient Prayer-book is a study; so will be presently his bow in the Belief, his courteous air of attention to the sermon, and the air with which he will by-and-by place five shillings (our money) on the plate.

The usual struggle for corners over, we settle ourselves in our places. Anak takes a sniff at his nosegay; Hetty smooths down a stray curl; Jill, over-careworn for her fifteen years, meditates, or I much misdoubt me, upon Higgins.

Opposite us, superior in point of numbers, though not in size, sit the curate's family of fourteen, once briefly epitomised by Kit as constant perseverance in well-doing.

Mr. Titmarsh lifts his eyes to the tablets, three in all, that line the wall and form one side to our pew; and our eyes follow his, though we know them all by heart, as well we may, seeing that to their number is due our misfortunes. How many parents have we really had, first and last?

Duly set down in black and white, yonder hangs the plain unvarnished tale, as follows:—

Tablet No. I.:

"To the memory of Hester, wife to John Sieviking of Sieviking, died May 12th, 185—, aged 29 years.

"To the memory of John Sieviking, who died Nov. 10th, 186—, aged 38 years."

Tablet No. II.:

"To the memory of Rosamond, wife to the Hon. Mark Trevelyan, and widow to John Sieviking of Sieviking, died March 10th, 186—, aged 42 years.

"To the memory of the Hon. Mark Trevelyan, husband to the above, died Dec. 20th, 186—, aged 50 years."

Tablet No. III.:

"To the memory of Amanda, widow of Hon. Mark Trevelyan, and wife to Josiah Titmarsh, Esq., died Sept. 1st, 186—, aged 41 years."

And after the luckless Amanda's death, a spot-

less expanse of white that I have once or twice observed Mr. Titmarsh to survey uneasily, as possibly thinking that his demise alone is wanting to complete the set.

Or—or—happy thought! (has it ever occurred to him?) to take to his bosom another wife, and *outlive* her?

People come from miles round to see these tablets, our family history is considered such a curiosity. And to our disgust we are often (till our genealogy is explained) taken to be a polyglot family of Sievikings, Trevelyans, and (save the mark!) Titmarshes.

We know not what we *may* be, so it is possible that we shall reckon strange children among us some day. So far as I can see, there is no reason why we should not go on having parents indefinitely to the end of the chapter, for it is certain that for some reason or other the air of Sieviking Court does *not* agree with them. As I have said, it is a popular fallacy that we killed them off; we were too sublimely indifferent to them to harry or molest them in any way. They counted for nothing in our lives; we called them "Sir," and "Madam!" sternly and invariably; saw their coffins depart with no more regret than the passing one that might be felt by an innkeeper for the strangers who had died

within his gates, and cynically wondered how soon the tolling bell would be set to wedding chimes again. Once only did we quit our position as uninterested onlookers, and swell with honest wrath; it was on the occasion of the last Madam presenting Mr. Mark Trevelyan with twins.

They (the parents) might dwell with us, spend with us, be recipients of our hospitality, but add to our numbers, engraft aliens upon the old Sieviking stock? Never! We rose up as one man, and decided that such a thing could not be permitted. The twins were themselves of this opinion, and had so much more proper a notion of what was due to us than had their parents, that they died almost immediately; and I will do Madam the justice to say that she perceived the error of her ways, and never repeated the indiscretion either then or during the Titmarsh epoch, and in fact behaved so handsomely about the whole affair that in process of time we overlooked the mistake. Indeed, in the Titmarsh days we came to regard her less as one of the visitors who were always coming and going at our house, than as a victim like ourselves, and therefore, in a sense, one of us.

And yet she was the cause of all our misfortunes, which began upon the day she installed her second mate (see Tablet No. III.) at Sieviking.

We had had merry, good, happy times in the days of our own parents; we had junketted royally through the Trevelyan reign, but with Mr. Titmarsh had come hard times that grew harder and harder with every year.

Hitherto, the establishment, like a gigantic ball that, once set rolling, revolves through the force of its own momentum, had been conducted in the same style as in father's and mother's time, and had remained untouched by the temporary rulers; but when *he* came, the ways of the Court gradually underwent a total change. Our abundant hospitalities ceased, nearly the whole staff of servants was by degrees dismissed, the stables emptied, apparently of their own accord, and the grooms and gardeners disappeared as if by magic. We began to understand that there was such a thing as money in the world; hitherto, we had concluded it to be conducted on credit, and supposed that food grew on tables at proper periods, and that clothes were intended to be ordered, and worn, without any intermediate process of putting our hands in our pockets. We thought it quite a joke when tradesmen asked us for money, but afterwards wondered at their impudence, and left Providence, or some invisible person who had hitherto arranged such little matters, to settle it.

When our governesses and tutors were dismissed, we threw up our caps and gloried in our liberty; but began to grow uneasy when new clothes no longer grew on our backs, and our table came to be provided with an effort.

We believed this state of things to be due simply and solely to Mr. Titmarsh's stinginess, but perhaps poor Madam knew better, for she fretted and pined, seeming to wither under his influence, and two years ago died.

Since then affairs have been on a sliding scale; we have actually come to the stage of want, and how much further than that can we go? One step more, and we are over the precipice—*then*———

I rouse myself from my reverie, to find that every one is standing up, and that our amiable vicar is as usual making of himself a stumbling-block in the way of our devotions, and severely trying the risible muscles of such of the congregation as have not from severe exercise acquired perfect control over the same.

He conducts the whole service as though it were a capital joke, which he is enjoying all to himself, and that every moment bursts upon him in some new and irresistibly comic light.

He balances himself alternately on his heels and his toes, now boldly appearing, now sinking into

obscurity; he smiles at us, beams at us, *nods* at us, talks at us, each sentence beginning with a fascinating smile that becomes more and more ecstatic, till it dies a sudden and unexpected death with the last word of the sentence, beginning it all *da capo*.

Scorning the aid of either book or psalter, he is able to devote his whole energies to making faces at his flock, and though we from long habit have grown accustomed to his vagaries, so are not strangers, who disappear convulsed behind handkerchief and hymn book, or who actually leave the church unable to contain themselves.

And now we are on our knees, and our pastor, instead of kneeling opposite his desk respectably, is resting his elbows on the side of the reading-desk, and peeping playfully over at us from time to time, every now and then disappearing bodily from our ken, but always coming up smiling, in the literal sense of the word.

Last Sunday he fell into a brown study while delivering the Ten Commandments, and absently sat down on the communion table, requiring to be heavily jogged therefrom by the curate.

Below him, seriously scandalised by his master's conduct, sits Potter the clerk, whose "Grasshusly hear us, good Lord, Grasshusly hear us—" has sounded in our ears every Sunday of our lives, and

who will doubtless, when we are all dead and buried, be still holding on to his red velvet cushion, turning up the whites of his eyes and murmuring, "Grass-husly hear us!"

Though he bears his honours meekly, he has some claim to fame, and is known far beyond the boundaries of his village.

At the age of seventy-six he married his third wife (he has sons and daughters of between fifty and sixty), and, a year after, she presented him with a bouncing boy, whereupon he was copied into all the local papers and covered with glory, though what there is to be proud of in having another mouth to feed, we can't imagine.

He occasionally thinks aloud, thus muddling up his responses and his ideas, so that if one day he made some such blunder as did that clerk, well-known to fame, who, on the awful occasion of the Bishop's visit, thus confounded it and the verse he was repeating:

"And the big 'ills did jump,
And the little 'ills did 'op;
And all at the coming of
The Lord Bi-*shop*—"

he would not at all surprise us.

The first lesson has begun, and our vicar is jerking out his sentences by way of an easy accom-

paniment to his occupation of (apparently) pulling himself upward towards the pulpit with one hand while he alternately paws over his countenance, and rumples up on end his few hairs with the other.

Our attention is distracted from him by the sudden throwing open of our pew-door by the sexton, and the irruption of two young women into our midst. Every other pew in the church is full, but, thanks to the ravages dealt by matrimony and foreign travel in our ranks, we have several places to spare, two of which the new arrivals fill. To Mr. Titmarsh, whose room is by us considered better than his company, and consequently gets plenty of space, is apportioned one damsel; the other falls to my lot.

There is a curious look of old acquaintance-ship about them; they are familiar, yet unfamiliar, to our ken. I find myself rubbing my eyes to make sure that I am not asleep, and even Mr. Titmarsh, whose face is a study, at the plebeian contact to which he is subjected, puts up his eye-glass as though some glimmer of recollection had crossed his mind.

In the two red-faced, flat-waisted Dulcineas be-fore me I seem to behold a stout Jill, a lean Hetty, then, certain familiar landmarks dawning upon me, I begin to see daylight. The girls' Dolly Vardens! No wonder they look us in the face like old friends

—no wonder they gape widely where they should meet in amity, and exchange the kiss of peace where fashion demands that they be divorced; for were they not made to fit Sieviking waists and busts, and shoulders?

If I wanted my revenge on Jill for her rebellion of yesterday I have it. She is scarlet, so is Hetty; their eyes are glued to their doubles, who—I am almost certain of it—*know*.

A new gown is not such an everyday affair in our family that we should forget one in a hurry; and by the green smudge on yon shoulder, and the rent across the biggest rose on the other, I could swear to them as to my own personalty, and I can't but think these gentle female hinds are as well aware of whose they were as I am. It is a mean trick served us by the Chancellor; but what has come to Anak? Is he taken violently ill, or has the sight of the girls' doubles proved too much for him?

He straightens himself out a bit, but after a glance at Mr. Titmarsh, whose eyes are cast heavenward, while his lips fervently murmur the responses, he gets a worse attack than before, and is evidently being tickled by some exquisite idea that but becomes the more delicious in every light by which it is viewed.

We envy him his tit-bit—he might share it with

us, for we are all unfeignedly and truly wretched, and what is worse, look it.

Talk about blighted affection, remorse, or a murder on your mind! give me, for sheer, downright, broken-hearted misery of countenance, an empty stomach. And for aggravation of the suffering commend me to the knowledge that you're going home presently to a bare board.

But to-morrow is Monday—Monday, when we shall dine fatly and well on chucky, who is intelligently enjoying himself to-day.

Our vicar is now in the pulpit—instructing us.

I wonder why the highest teaching of the Maker's noblest work, man, falls so infinitely short of the meanest truth taught us by the hand of Nature? A green leaf, a flower, a caterpillar, will show us the Deity in all His grandeur, when the many words of man but obscure Him from our sight.

I hearken to our vicar's ramblings, and doubt. I look at Anak's nosegay, and believe. Up to the age of six years old I had faith also, but at that period it was rudely destroyed. Left alone one day I broke a valuable plate in two pieces, and as I stared at it in terror, there flashed across me what I had been taught that very day, viz., how faith could remove mountains, and how, whatever one prayed for, one would obtain, if only one prayed and be-

lieved hard enough. So I turned my back on the plate and prayed hard, harder, *hardest*, still, whenever I looked over my shoulder there was the broken plate, and there was I. I had not a grain of doubt; I felt *certain* I should see the two pieces joined together again without so much as a crack to show what had happened, but at last I stopped, disappointed and ashamed. And after that the story of the mustard-tree and the mountains was just a fable to me, no more.

"*I say!* girls," says Anak, in a loud whisper, as at length we rise to depart, "what do you think of your" (a smothered explosion) "your doubles? They're as like you as two peas—and as green. She *might* have taken the smudges off while she was about it."

"On one point," whispers back Hetty, with red cheeks and flashing eyes, "I am resolved—that if ever I can afford the luxury" (she clenches her one-gloved hand with such vigour that its cover splits in two), "I will quarrel, irretrievably quarrel, with the Chancellor of the Exchequer!"

CHAPTER V.

"I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour everywhere."

COLONEL DESART has arrived; so has the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Delectable smells testify to the hospitable cares of host Titmarsh below; a single glass and a half-filled decanter announce the utmost extent of ours above.

Nevertheless, if the refreshments we provide are limited, our preparations are not; with the hearty and united good will of the whole family have we dusted, swept, and garnished the blue bed-chamber from top to bottom, while if elbow-grease is good for anything, then should our old furniture be equal to new.

It is our aim to appear as prosperous and easy as our circumstances permit, as we are perfectly aware that well-to-do people are always able to drive harder bargains than poor ones.

There was a time when we received the Chancellor with open shame of countenance, when our moneyed friend was smuggled in at one back door, only to be hustled out at another, when—

"Few and short were the words we spoke"

in our dealings with that illustrious personage, but finding that our pride disastrously affected our pockets, and having long ago discovered that business is the first law of self preservation, we are now affable, cool, wide awake, and if in the course of transactions shortly to be described any one gets done, I venture to think that individual does not answer to the name of Sieviking. I wonder why, until to-day, it has never occurred to me how like Joseph's unlucky brethren we must look, as we stand in a semicircle, each behind his or her heap, our eyes fixed upon the autocrat seated in our midst? In one respect alone we differ, that in *our* sacks alas! are no gold or silver cups; we devoutly wish there were, as the Chancellor's eye disparagingly rests upon the wares, carefully arranged best side uppermost before her.

"Is that all you've got for me to-day?" she says, rubbing her nose irritably.

There—the murder is out, our Chancellor is a *she*. And why not, pray, seeing that there was once a female Pope, and if a female Pope, why not a female Chancellor?

"You should have sent for me before, Miss Jill," she said severely, "and not waited till your clothes was all dropping off your backs; if there's one thing

I can't abide more than another, it's going home with my purse *full*."

It is an ill we could bear a good deal of, and our mouths water as she produces from her reticule a purse through whose meshes gleam many shining images of Her Majesty, and at the opening of whose steel lips, lo! there seem to come tumbling into our laps all manner of small luxuries and delights, while new boots and pantaloons grow upon every bush.

"There!" she says; "I brought all that for *you;* ain't it a pity to have to take it all home again?"

It is, indeed. There is the money, here are *we;* the Chancellor desires to leave it, we ardently desire to receive it; where then is the hitch?

We look down, sighing, at the little sad coloured heaps at our feet, and the hopes that have gone up like rockets, come down like sticks, for they tell us that, though we *might* compass silver, gold is altogether beyond us. Indeed, our visions assume a copper-coloured tint, in which even a bonnet becomes doubtful and a pair of boots impossible.

"I think we had better get to business," says Jill, with the calmness of despair.

"I don't call it business; I call it *rubbish*," says the Chancellor, with a superlative hitch of the nose, as she pounces upon Anak's heap, as being nearest

to her, and holds up to our derision the garment to which he has pinned his fondest hopes.

"Now I should like to know," she says, wrathfully, "what any decent woman could give for *that?*"

That is a pea-jacket that she ruthlessly holds up to daylight, and through which she thrusts her fingers, seeming to snap them, so to speak, in our faces.

"Pray, what would be the use of my letting you have it," says Anak, loftily, "if it were of any use to me? And coats ain't made to poke your fingers through, but to be *worn.*"

"I pity them as wears this'n," says the Chancellor, ineffably; "I'd better go over everything in one heap, for I see I shan't be able to give you more than a pound for the lot."

A pound! O! ye gods, something must be done to appease the Deity. Something is.

Jill comes forward, bearing the decanter and glass. No matter whence that wine comes, purloined though it be, it is our own, and we offer it as such.

In all dishonesty do we press it on our guest, in the ardent hope that it will fuddle her brains to a pitch incompatible with her own interests, and consequently vastly in favour of our pockets.

"It ain't none of your cowslip wine, is it?" she

says, eyeing the outstretched tumbler suspiciously, "that *were* stuff, and no mistake."

Indeed it was. Who would believe that those yellow belfries, made for bees to swing in, could ever be decocted into so vile a potion as that which we once brewed? Though I am inclined to think our sloe jam, in nastiness, beat the cowslip wine out of the field.

We assure her that we have had no hand in the making of *this*, and she takes a sip on trust, then another, and another. Apparently she is more used to Madeira than we guessed. A glass a piece to *us* would make us generous to the extent of giving away our heads, but upon her it has a contrary and disastrous effect.

At one glass she is sharper, more super-humanly keen at detecting holes, rents, and stains than ever; at two glasses she becomes acrimonious; at three, she sets down any error made in her own favour to the fault of our hospitality, and cheats unblushingly on the plea of her wits being obfuscated.

"It's good stuff," she says, setting down the empty wine-glass by her side. "I only wish there was summut as good *here*." She looks at the bundles. "Ah! the only time I ever got anything worth having was when Miss Hetty there sent for me, unbeknown to anybody, and let me in herself at the wash-hus

door—which my perfession is a respectable one, and nothink to be ashamed on."

"*We* know," I say, cutting her short; and indeed have we not good reason to know of the Chancellor's first visit? Did not our superfluous coats, hats, waistcoats, and boots disappear as by magic one fine day, while on the following Sunday Hetty came out in a gorgeous black silk, for which she could never honestly account?

Putting this and that together, adversity *alias* Mr. Titmarsh having sharpened our wits, we give our sister no second opportunity of again turning an honest penny at our expense, and now reap every man the benefit of his own.

"A shilling," says the Chancellor, throwing the pea jacket behind her, "which means a dead loss to me of sixpence."

"Two shillings," says Anak, firmly.

"Couldn't do it, sir," shaking her head virtuously; "to rob oneself's nigh as bad as robbing one's neighbour—one and three, pr'aps——"

"One and nine," says Anak, in the tone of one who alters his last will and testament; and "One and six," says the Chancellor, in that of the parson who says "Amen."

"One old hat, a penny," she continues in dull recitative, and no one gainsays her; indeed the per-

son who wears it, deserves a penny far more than the one who sells it.

"One weskit (what there is of it), tuppence; three pairs of knickerbockers, sixpence——"

"Hold hard!" cries Anak, "the cotton used for darning one pair alone, cost more than that, and it's all there, every bit of it!"

"Sevenpence," says the Chancellor, "and not a farthing more, if it was ever so. One pair of gaiters thrown in for luck." She suits the action to the word.

"There will be no throwing in for luck to-day," says Anak, getting rather warm, as well he may, seeing that he has not advanced so far even as the sole of one of his new boots; "threepence, if *you* please, ma'am."

"Threeha'pence," says the Chancellor, promptly, "and for the rest of the lot,"—she swiftly rolls up the odds and ends, and throws them behind her—"sixpence, whick makes two and tenpence 'alfpenny, and as I always pays my way as I goes, why here's the money, sir—and now for the next lot."

But for the first time in his life, Anak is backward at taking the money held out to him.

Nodding his head three times, with his eye sternly fixed upon the Chancellor, he stalks to where

his cast-off wardrobe reposes, and unearths a something that he proceeds to unfold with care.

"You thought because it was turned inside out I'd forgotten it, didn't you?" he says, crushingly, "and its two and elevenpence halfpenny, not two and *ten*, and you know it."

"La," says the Chancellor, affecting to consider, "so it is, to be sure—my poor head—it's all the fault of that sherry wine."

"There!" says Anak, unfolding his treasure, and, so that none of its beauties may be wasted, proceeding to array himself in it; "so you thought you were going to get all that *for nothing*, did you, ma'am?"

Whence can he possibly have obtained it? out of what forgotten cupboard has he dug it? It is of a bright gold-coloured satin, embroidered in flowers, large as to their size and glowing as to their tints, which have to all appearance liberally shared in the good things partaken of by their owner during life.

"Never say after this that we don't give you anything handsome," says Anak, watching the Chancellor's eye that has for a moment brightened, but now gets professionally dim again.

"H'm," she says, pursing up her lips; "it'll take

a deal of cleaning, and them weskits ain't feshionable now-a-days, folks don't wear 'em."

"Because they can't afford to buy them," says Anak, grandly. "*I* know what Farmer Coles would give for a thing like this to wear at a tenant's dinner, if *you* don't."

"It's small," says the Chancellor, disparagingly; "very small for a man as means eating a good dinner. A Cheap-Jack might fancy it, 'twould be a regular 'tisement. Half-a-crown, sir, though it's a wronging of all them little innocent B's at home to give so much for it."

"Four shillings," says Anak, taking off the waistcoat, and putting it under his arm.

"Couldn't do it, sir; half-a-crown or nothing."

"Then you shan't have my bundle at all," he says, rolling up the same, and marching to the door.

Apparently she is used to the proceeding, for she beholds his progress with equanimity, and it is only when he is seen nearing the end of the passage that she makes any sign.

"Two-and-nine," she says, without raising her voice. Autocrats need never storm; their whispers are always audible. He does not turn, but walks very slowly.

She is too crafty to give him three pence a step, so waits.

"Three-and-six," he says, making a feint of proceeding.

"Three shillings," she says, with spirit, "if 'twas the last words ever I spoke, which, with the two and eleven pence halfpenny, makes six shillings all but a ——"

"I'll owe you the halfpenny, ma'am," says Anak, with a broad grin, as he takes the three bright two-shilling pieces out of her half-closed hand, and sure enough, though the Chancellor tries to father the debt on each of us in turn, when she departs, he actually owes it her still.

"And now," she says, turning to Hetty, "if there's anything worth taking away, I expect it'll be in *your* bundle, miss.

But Hetty does not respond to this affable advance; the Dolly Vardens plainly rankle in her mind, sheer necessity alone inducing her to stand by her wares. What will not beauty do, however, to obtain a new bonnet? Needs must when the devil drives.

"Its going to be a bad day all round," says the Chancellor, irritably; "five shillings is the utmost I can do for *you*, Miss Hetty, and that's the truth."

Hetty's rosy face lengthens. Abandoning costly wrath, she condescends to point out the many excellencies of her goods, to which we all come in chorus with such remarks, as "Look at the elegant

buttons upon it," "Just see its beautiful little waist!" etc.

"That's just where it is," says the Chancellor, with asperity, "you young ladies has got such little bits of waists, and such wide shoulders, there's no gal hereabouts as your clothes 'll fit. Your figgers is the very moral of what your poor ma's was—not that I ever seed her, 'cept when she was driving and sich. The inside of this house weren't for the likes o' me in *those* days.

She puts her head on one side, retrospectively; can it be that, though late in the day, our Madeira is turning up trumps?

"Seems but yesterday," she continues, "that I saw you all a walking into church, two and two, dressed just like little princes and princesses, and your ma in a *mory antick* as 'ud stand on end—the very feller of the one I've got at home for visiting!"

Jill groans: how many holocausts of our garments have not gone to rear the fabric of that stupendous *mory antick?*

"Don't be downhearted, miss," says the Chancellor, misunderstanding Jill's involuntary sigh, "and I'll give you eighteenpence for your bundle" (never, never has Jill's been known to fetch more; she is indeed attired with such a strict regard to economy that she could scarcely part with anything without

returning to the costume of the first parents), "and better luck next time—which makes six-and-six between you, young ladies."

"Five shillings won't buy a bonnet," says Hetty, in tones of despair; "neither will eighteenpence get a tooth stopped."

"That it won't," says the Chancellor, promptly, "though if you'd try and find a few more things, miss, I'd be 'appy to leave you as many sovrinks as I've just give you shillings."

Hetty stands irresolute; her gaze wandering downward, first over her own pretty figure, then over the walls and ceiling, as though seeking an inspiration or—old clothes. Still thinking, she moves from our midst, a very Venus of sober maiden meditation.

"Mr. Sieviking, sir, your turn," says the Chancellor. "H'm; your cricketing flannels and shoes, I see." I toss them towards her with my foot, scorning to explain that as I can't pay my subscription to my club, I shan't require them this year.

But before my goods are finally appraised the door opens to admit Hetty. She bears a suit of black with which we are unfamiliar, and is indeed in far too good a state of preservation to have ever belonged to any of us.

"*No!*" says Anak, going off into a roar, "why you've never—you've never———?"

"*Yes*," says Hetty, facing us all with a very red face, and a firmness that nothing short of a coveted new bonnet could endue her with; "he called me *fat*, you know."

An insult to a woman's looks will excuse anything; nevertheless, we do not approve, and Hetty knows it.

"Ten shillings," she says, holding out her hand, and, wonder of wonders, the Chancellor disinters a little beautiful bit of gold, and without a word of chaffering, hands it over.

"We're beginning to get on," says the Chancellor, briskly. "Now then" (looking round), "any old carpets, mats, pillows, curtains, or some of that bed furniture as set you young ladies up in Dolly Vardens, and made you feshionable for above a year?"

And she jingles the contents of her purse before our eyes and ears in a way that the Arch Tempter himself couldn't surpass. Fired as by one impulse, and demoralized possibly by Hetty's good luck, we all rush different ways, the Chancellor cheering us on as we appear before her at intervals with all the movable goods that we can lay our hands upon.

"For Heaven's sake!" cries Jill, "leave yourselves a bed to hide yourselves in when the last of your clothes are gone." But we heed her not. "New lamps for old" is our cry, and for the first time in

our lives we begin to understand a little of what it must be like to *gamble*.

"You're quite sure that's all?" says the Chancellor, at last, from behind the mound we have raised, and which renders her totally invisible to us.

We are quite sure, unless indeed we throw in our own substantial bodies, "for luck."

"Then I may as well put it all up," she says.

"Pay us first," says Anak, the practical.

She does. It is long indeed since our palms have pressed such riches, and we strut about with feelings that Crœsus might have envied.

"The best clearing out I've ever had in *this* house," says the Chancellor, complacently, as she draws from her reticule a neatly folded sack, which she places on the ground at a distance, then proceeds to stoke its capacious mouth with hats, coats, curtains, and what not, cramming them down with the skill of a practised hand.

It is always a fascinating sight to us, and we stand around watching the performance. The Chancellor stands barely five feet high; the sack, filled, is nearly six, and the incompatibility between them seems to strike her disagreeably, as she ties up its mouth with string, standing on tiptoe to do it.

"Sam's waiting for me outside," she says, dubiously, "but I ain't ekal to getting it downstairs—I

wonder now if there's any young gentleman here as would like to earn an honest sixpence by carrying it down for me?"

Her shrewd eyes fall upon Anak's stalwart proportions. Will he rise to the bait? He does.

Sixpence is sixpence, however obtained, and muscular exertion is all in the day's work; first securing his fee, therefore, Anak advances, and with one well-directed kick sends the sack spinning to the farther end of the room, himself following it; so do we, the Chancellor bringing up the rear, a lady at large bearing a reticule. Somehow the notion tickles our fancy, or perhaps the money has got into our heads; at any rate we clean forget all about *him*, as we sweep turbulently along to the head of the stairs, standing back as Anak, collecting his energies for one superhuman effort, sends the sack flying down the wide staircase and past the archway leading to our step-parent's rooms.

Past it, did I say? Not quite. Who are these figures that, approaching from the side just as the sack is spinning past the opening, catch its whole force full front, and fall back upon each other like overthrown ninepins?

Our haggling has taken longer than we thought; luncheon is over, the guest is departing, and Mr.

Titmarsh was speeding him on his way, till the sack sped him—in the wrong direction.

We are too petrified to move; one behind the other we stand—a very Jacob's ladder of heads, with the Chancellor's topping us, and peeping over to ascertain the cause of our sudden transfixion.

Mr. Titmarsh recovers himself with difficulty; his guest, with more ease advancing in search of the cause of his catastrophe, comes to a full stop opposite—Hetty.

"Pray forgive this unfortunate *contretemps*, Desart," says Mr. Titmarsh, crooking his arm in that of his friend, and seeking to draw him back to the rooms they have just quitted; "these young people, I see, are on their way from the store-room. Um! ah!" (he bows towards the sack that, having turned a somersault or two, now stands rakishly on its head); "*potatoes*, I imagine."

The many bumps and excrescences visible might pass for the useful domestic bulb before mentioned to an uninitiated eye, but to ours they represent nothing of the sort.

"And an uncommonly pretty little housekeeper you've got," says the Colonel, resisting that backward pressure, and likewise fixing his eyes on Hetty. "By Gad! Titmarsh, but you've got a fine family here, and never said a word about it either; sly

dog!" and he gives Mr. Titmarsh a dig in the ribs that makes that gentleman, fresh from his bruises, wince.

Before he can reply, before Hetty can even blush any harder, or Anak withdraw his leg, still outstretched, as when the catastrophe froze us all as we stood, a small, shrill, terrible voice uplifts itself from our rear.

"And Begging your pardon, gentlemen, but yon's not potatoes, but old clothes, all bought and all *paid for*. Which I'll thank you, young man" (to Anak), "seeing as how I've give you sixpence to convey that sack off these premises, and business bein' business, and another party waiting for me round the corner, to be a *moving on*, if *you* please."

With all our faults let it never be said that we are dishonourable. Had not that hot sixpence above stairs been pressed into Anak's receptive palm he might now leave the Chancellor to struggle herself and sack out of sight as best she may. As it is, he advances like a man, and the kick being pretty well taken out of him by now, shoulders the sack and marches off with it.

The Chancellor, descending gingerly, opens her reticule, and fishes therefrom several cards, which, on passing Colonel Desart, she presents to him with a bobbing curtsey.

He acknowledges the same with a bow and puzzled air.

"The best of prices given," she says, solemnly; "ladies and gents waited on in their own houses, or if living at a distance, parcels sent to my address (see card) punctually attended to, and the full value of the goods remitted by P.O.O., which one card is for yourself, sir, and the other for distribooshun among your friends. Good morning, sir. All bought" (she waves her hand towards the direction the sack has taken), "and *all* paid for. Good day."

CHAPTER VI.

"Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest,
Lend less than thou owest,
Ride more than thou goest,
Learn more than thou trowest,
Set less than thou throwest"

FOUR days have elapsed since our grand *fiasco*, and we are beginning to hold up our heads again, being considerably helped thereto by the blessed consciousness of having something in our pockets besides our hands. Talk about the elixir of happiness, who wants it when he possesses ready money? *We* don't. For a fine independence of spirit and a stiff backbone give *me* a full pocket. To know that one is going to be ruined to-morrow is nothing in comparison with being penniless to-day.

We buy our cut of mutton, take our glass of beer with the best, and Anak chancing to meet the Chancellor of the Exchequer one morning near the village public, treats her magnificently out of her own money.

Hetty has got a smart bonnet and tippet, Jill's tooth has been made equal to new, while the rest of

us need no longer fear unkind remarks when we turn our backs to our enemies.

Anak alone has disappointed all expectations, the new boots in which we expected him to devour hill and dale being conspicuous by their absence, while our curiosity is severely exercised by his frequent and mysterious disappearances from our midst. We are divided between the belief that he is carrying on a courtship at a distance, or that he has hired himself out as a day-labourer, the latter opinion being strengthened by the fact that he always returns out of breath and—thirsty. The girls, however, lean to the former notion, as he has been once or twice overheard, in a voice fearfully out of tune, *humming;* and does a young man learn to sing, pray, to please his sisters? Not a bit of it; they are born to play the accompaniments.

And meanwhile our aunt's chariot-wheels drive heavily, and neither she nor Mr. Pitt are to be expected yet awhile The latter is on the Continent, putting salt on the tail of an individual who has eloped with all his partner's worldly goods, not forgetting his neighbour's wife, while our favourite aunt is laid up with a quinsy. It's to be hoped she's not too ill to have a hamper packed, else, I'm afraid, she will fare badly when she comes.

Perhaps Mr. Titmarsh will offer her a seat at his

table; for ourselves, we have not accepted his handsome offer of sharing the delicacies (bought by our own money) with him, and which appears to us about as reasonable as was the Government allowance once made by Lords Goderich and Howick of two razors per annum for shaving the ebony chins of the West Indian negroes, who have no beards! Neither have we appetites for *caviare* and olives; therefore we have not caused his cruse of oil to diminish.

It is while we are awaiting our visitors that an extraordinary circumstance happens, and for the first time in our lives we are made (to all appearance) the victims of a supernatural occurrence.

It must be about twelve o'clock one night, the fourth after the visit of the Chancellor, that I wake with a hideous discord sounding in my ears, which proceeds apparently from the garden.

I open my window, but can, of course, make out nothing, though the whereabouts of the intruder is easily guessed by the fearful row he is making. Some fool playing us a practical joke, I suppose; shall I throw my boots at him as a gentle hint to be gone? No, for he might stick to them, and, being my only pair, I should find it awkward,

so I put them on instead, and sally forth to investigate.

Looking in at Anak's door, I find he has already descended, and on the stairs I fall in with Solomon and the girls, who have come out well rolled up in blankets to see the sport.

It is pitch dark in the garden, the only light visible being that which in a distant window illuminates a small white-clad figure, who uneasily peeps forth into the night.

Marshall is here, of course. His orders have been simple; "Ascertain who is making that infernal noise, and eject the person instantly," and, with so much sound to guide him, the carrying out of them should surely be simpler still, only that, like Mrs. Glasse's hare, before cooking his hare, he must first catch it.

It booms above, around, in the midst of us; it even has the effect of ventriloquism, and seems to proceed from each of us in turn; is here, there, everywhere at once, which is precisely why the author of it is so hard to catch, and why, when we think we have pinned him, we find we have only violently seized upon one another.

"I've got 'im!" cries Marshall, exultantly, as a blast is blown into his very ear, and he clutches,

and rolls over with—into a neighbouring flower-bed —me.

"Here he is!" says Anak from a remote corner, simultaneously with another blast, and away we dash in hot pursuit only to hear, when we have reached the spot, a dolorous howl from the place we have just quitted.

"Oft in the stilly night," is his theme, but owing to his rapid and enforced flights, and to the fact that he oftener than not hits upon the wrong note, but won't proceed till he has found the right one, and invariably takes up the burden of the song exactly where he laid it down, he has not reached the end of even the first verse.

O! ye heavens, what a rich treat must he not be furnishing out to Mr. Titmarsh yonder, to whose sensitive ear a raised voice even is discord, and a false note in music the most exquisite agony! His soul must be simply raked by the excruciating din, and verily, our visitor, whoever he may be, is revenging some of the injuries inflicted upon *us*, by the tortures he is imposing on *him*.

Were we not so exasperated at the performer's skill in eluding us, we might leave him, in consideration of the misery he is inflicting on our stepparent, to continue his solo indefinitely, but our blood is up, and we are determined to welch the

individual who, in spryness, wind and dexterity, is more than a match for us all. He is playful too,—such as dealing us unexpected digs out of the darkness, knocking our hats over our eyes, and tripping us up in odd corners, which amenities we attribute to one another, and return with interest, a free fight being imminent when Kitty, bearing the lantern, for which we have frequently and loudly called, sheds a little light upon the scene. We cease pommelling each other, not letting go, however, in case either of us should have got hold of the real Simon Pure, our grasp relaxing, and our wrath giving way to honest laughter, as the absurdity of the situation strikes us —laughter that is abruptly checked as Marshall, in a voice of ecstacy, cries "I've got the villain! Here he is! *I* see you sneaking away, you warmint!" These remarks being jerked out spasmodically, as he drags forward a figure whose remonstrances and objurgations he does not even hear in his excitement; a figure that is so muffled up as to resemble a small mummy set on end, whose face is entirely hidden by the comforter swathed below it, and whose gloved hands most assuredly contain no instrument of torture.

"Yah!" cries Marshall, giving it a violent shake, while half-a-dozen rude hands tear the comforter aside, to display the features of—Mr. Titmarsh.

"O! sir," says Marshall, dropping him, and recoiling horror-struck and fit to fall himself.

"So it is you, sir," I say, almost as amazed as Marshall, "who have been playing us this trick?"

And yet that it is *he* who has been playfully tripping us up, and prodding our ribs, we can *not* believe.

"I? No, indeed," says Mr. Titmarsh, patiently; "and I think I have some right to complain of the treatment that I have received. I have been tripped up, and jumped upon (I believe two of my ribs are broken), and one of my front teeth is missing, and I have swallowed a whole cigar. I merely strolled out to see if I could be of any assistance."

But we eye him suspiciously. Why has the discord ceased the moment he is caught?

"You can play, sir," says Anak; "we've heard you—often" (on bird-snaring nights we have not scorned to hearken to his faultless fiddling), "and you see there is nobody here" (he lifts the lantern, and throws its light around) "but ourselves, and you, and Marshall. *You* know best whether *we* can, or not."

"I do play," says Mr. Titmarsh, with a certain dignity, "but not the cornet. You need not come with me, Marshall," as that abject person follows

him with stammering apologies; "you can remain, and—catch the right person."

And the muffled-up figure glides away.

"That *was* a shake you gave him and no mistake, Marshall," says Anak, comfortingly; "but I think I'm answerable for his tooth—unless anybody else has lost one? I know I knocked one out of somebody's mouth, for it cut my hand."

"And I did hear something crack when I doubled somebody up," I confess, guiltily; "but perhaps it was only his watch, not his ribs—though the sack the other day may have loosened *those*, you know."

"We'll look for his tooth to-morrow," says Anak; "I think it'll be in the flower-bed—don't you see something moving over there?" And he goes scurrying away as—

"The—cheer-ful—hearts—now—bro-ken—"

(we only wish the performer's wind was) is jerked out in the distance.

Away we go, the same old game beginning over again, with this difference only, that at the end of another half-hour we have caught nothing, not even a Titmarsh. We got out of temper, spiteful even, the girls' stifled laughter adding fuel to our wrath.

Shall we retire, leaving that beast, who is now

blowing away in the distance apparently as fresh as when he began, in possession of the field?

Never! daylight is bound to deliver him into our hands, and forming a *cordon* round the lawn, so that escape is impossible, we sit down on the kitchen chairs brought to us by Kitty, and await the morning with such patience as we may.

Sick of failure, we take no notice when impudent blasts are blown up our noses and down our throats; we even nod after awhile with one eye open.

But when daylight *does* come, disclosing us to each other with noses of the tint that the young lilac buds will be by-and-by, it discloses nothing else—the garden is empty.

Evidence of the night's scrimmage is, however, visible in plenty, in the shape of trampled flower-beds, torn off buttons, scraps of check clothing (O! Jill, Jill, why were we not born cherubims? What a lot of darning and trouble it would have saved!), the sole of one of Anak's boots, and, as I live, after a little search, Mr. Titmarsh's tooth!

At breakfast, another war is waged, but only of words this time, the girls being convinced that a real ghost has paid us a visit, since, how was it possible that anything of flesh and blood could escape,

the rest of us sticking to the belief that it was a practical joke most cleverly played.

Anak stalks about, truculently vowing to break every bone in the fellow's skin when he catches him, a threat which causes Kitty, who overhears him, to be seized with a fit of laughter that sets our suspicions pointing towards *her*, as being possibly at the bottom of the whole thing.

A very little reflection, however, disabuses our minds of the idea, and we spend the forenoon in improvising lanterns by fixing tallow candles into wooden frames. An insufficiency of light last night possibly aided in our discomfiture: to-night there shall be no chance of seizing one another by mistake.

Girding up our loins, we swear by all our gods that to-night we will catch him or perish in the attempt! and in order to take time by the forelock, ten o'clock is the hour fixed for the rendezvous in the garden.

It is disappointing, therefore, to find Anak at nine o'clock taken so severely ill as to be compelled to swallow a monster jorum of brimstone and treacle (the only medicine he ever takes), and retire to his bed, whither he is attended by Jill, who carefully tucks up, and watches over him till he falls asleep.

At ten we assemble, girls and all, but the disturber of our peace does not turn up till eleven.

At the first note of discord, seven matches fly to seven candles, which are swung aloft, but taller tapers than ours are required would we see the author of it, who is apparently half-a-mile or so above us.

We gaze at one another blankly, for the moment believing that we are indeed the victims of a supernatural occurrence; then, as by a sudden inspiration, set off as fast as our legs will carry us, to that corner of the garden especially belonging to Mr. Titmarsh, and upon which his windows look.

Exactly opposite them, and at a right angle with the wall, stands a tall poplar, from the summit of which proceeds, or we are much mistaken, the strains which but now we attributed to the clouds.

"My—pretty—Jane—my—darling—Jane"

he puffs out laboriously, and Mr. Titmarsh, who has approached the window at sound of our approaching feet, claps his hands to his head, with a gesture that is almost grand by reason of its despair. Whereupon I vow that, if the cornet has hitherto been possessed of one demon of discord, seven infinitely worse ones now enter in, jarring even *our* by no means sensitive ears to a pitch of madness.

"There can't be no mistake *this* time," says Marshall, "there's but one right of way out of a tree, and that's by the foot."

"D'you suppose we mean to wait till he comes down?" I inquire; "he will be *fetched* and kicked off neck and crop——" I pause, remembering that only one out of our number is able to climb that tree, and that one is missing—Anak.

"A ladder," suggests the Squiffer; but on search being made for it, that useful belonging its found to be missing likewise.

There is no help for it; I must fetch Anak. I go indoors, and to his room, in which a subdued light is burning. There he lies, his broad back turned towards me, his abundant locks half hiding the pillow, evidently dead asleep.

I stretch my hand to wake him, but draw it back again—it is bitingly cold out yonder, and if he is taken out of his warm bed, may he not take a chill, and die of it, as poor Job did last winter, when he was compelled to get up, because his house was on fire? Vengeance on our ghost is not worth a funeral. I leave him in peace, and go out again.

After all, last night was better than to-night . . . there was at any rate a little excitement in it . . . and we grow to loathe the very name of Jane, and

will never in our lives ask anyone of that name to meet us, if we know it.

We watch till chilly night has given place to chilly dawn, till we are numbed in body, sore in spirit, and only prevented from ingloriously falling asleep by the ear-splitting solo going on overhead, but when, at length, daylight *does* come, it shows us the poplar-tree—empty. Whereupon, windy threats, objurgations—bed.

CHAPTER VII.

"Crack! went the whip, round went the wheels,
Were never folks so glad,
The stones did rattle underneath
As though Cheapside were mad."

A DISH of primroses at one side of the table, a dish of blue and white violets at the other. A space at the top, a cheek at the bottom, and a pipkin full of flowers before every plate, at which each may take a sniff between every mouthful, and so keep his appetite well within bounds.

"And remember, boys," says Jill, impressively, as she steps back from the table she has been setting out with care, "that though you will be invited, nay *pressed* to partake of the roast mutton, that you are all to prefer the cold cheek, just as if you hadn't been eating pig for the last fortnight till you loathed his very name."

"But supposing Pink May has not had one killed lately," says Anak, in a grumbling tone, "and would like a bit of cheek, mayn't one of us have the slice of mutton instead of her?"

"There is the cheese," says Jill, severely; "mutton

can always be curried or hashed—cheese can't. I know what *I* shall think of the person who eats mutton—that he's a *greedy*——"

"Master's compliments," says Marshall, appearing suddenly in our midst, "and he's going to meet Miss Sieviking at one o'clock, and will Miss Hetty like to go with him?"

"And pray who told him that anyone was coming?" says Anak, facing round; "you have been listening at keyholes again, I suppose——"

But Marshall, standing at attention, his eyes fixed on Hetty, vouchsafes no reply.

"Miss Hetty's going to the station with *me* to meet our aunt," I say, looking up; "you can tell Mr. Titmarsh so, with my compliments."

Marshall touches an imaginary hat. "Very good, sir. Master's going to drive White Bess in the phaeton, and I've orders to take the spring-cart for the luggage."

"Then you'll have to draw it," says Anak, fiercely, "for you won't have Billy."

Marshall, with a very faint approach to a smile, again touches an imaginary hat, and vanishes.

"He thinks he's going to have Billy, does he?" cries Anak, with the force of a pent volcano, when the man has really gone; "we'll soon see about that."

"The sneak!" I burst out, every whit as enraged as Anak; "trying to do the civil, and butter over Pink May with his polite little attentions, as he does all the rest of our relations—is she going to pay him a visit, pray, or *us*?"

"Take a back seat on our own phaeton—*never!*" cries Hetty, with flashing eyes; "just as if I were a boy in buttons!"

"I wonder what she will say, on finding none of us at the station to meet her?" says the Squiffer; "and he will tell her a fine pack of lies about us coming home!"

"*I* mean to go," says Anak; "and what's more, I intend to *bring her back* with me!"

And he disappears with a mien that betokens some portentous deed.

"Then you'll have to bring her behind you on a pillion," I say, following him, and possessed by the same idea as he is. But turning the corner of the stables, we run against Marshall coming away from them, and though his face is absolutely expressionless, it does not surprise me to find the stable-door, when we reach it—locked.

"The villain!" cries Anak, in a fury, "I'll go after him, and make him give the key up."

But I snatch at his flying coat-tail, and pull him back.

"What's the good?" I say; "he's reached the house by now, and handed it to Mr. Titmarsh. Don't give him a laugh at our expense, but let's see if we can't have one at *his*."

Anak fuming, mounts his stilts, and looks in at the window upon Billy, who is munching carrots, blissfully unconscious of the degradation in store for him.

"*I* could get in fast enough," says Anak, ruefully; "but how to get Billy out—there's the rub."

He drops to the ground, and stands chafing, while I go to the coach-house to reconnoitre.

It is not locked, for the excellent reason that Marshall knows we can't draw either carriage or cart five miles to a station, and five miles back.

"Hooray!" cries Anak, seizing a stilt, and whirling it round his head. I've got an idea—we'll do him yet, Dick, see if we don't—*Jemima!*"

I throw myself back against the wall in a fit of laughter, that must cause Mr. Titmarsh, who can easily hear it from the house, to think that we are taking our check pretty hilariously.

"You can't do it," I say. "Think of poor Pink May's feelings—you couldn't do it, you know," and I relapse again into helpless mirth.

"If aunt's the girl I take her for," says Anak, "she won't throw her own nephew over for fifty

Jemimas. Anyway, we'll see." And he marches off at the rate of ten miles an hour.

Left to myself, Anak's idea tickles me to such an extent that I am still propped against the wall, incapable of movement, when he returns in triumph, leading a very old, broken-winded donkey, whose coat, formerly white, is now of a dingy drab colour.

"You'll never get her as far as the station," I say, walking round her; "or if you do, you'll have to carry her home again. Better see if you can't borrow a pony!"

"Who'll lend us one, unless we pay for its hire?" says Anak; "and there's more work in Jemima than you think. If I start within half-an-hour, and walk her all the way, she'll get a good rest there, and come back at a spanking rate."

"Poor Jemmy!" I say, looking at her as she stands, a perfect monument of misery, her four hoofs brought together beneath her, while her back describes a very Cupid's bow. "She don't look very spanking now!"

"I'll give her a carrot before she goes," says Anak, hopefully, "and as to the harness, I'll go and fetch Billy's."

And he disappears into the interior of the stable,

but returns almost instantly, empty-handed and—Profane.

We laughed too loud, and too soon; Marshall probably is laughing in the house, yonder, at our expense, for in locking the stable door he has not neglected to lock that of the harness room also.

We stare at one another; our faces blank as Jemima's, but no idea comes this time to our aid till the Squiffer appears upon the scene, and is informed of the position of affairs.

"*Ropes*," he suggests promptly; "there's any amount in the washhouse,—I'll go and fetch 'em."

He is back with an armful directly, and in a trice the spring-cart is drawn out into the courtyard; Jemima is backed into it, and we all set to work, splicing, knotting, tying, till she is fixed between the shafts so tightly that, even if she wanted to tumble down, she couldn't.

Now, by all the laws of propriety and seniority, it is my plain duty to prevent any member of the family disgracing himself and us, by making such a public exhibition of our poverty, or putting Pink May to the blush, by asking her to travel in such a vehicle as this.

But the notion of Mr. Titmarsh's face, when his eyes fall on Anak drawn up before the station door, is so exquisite, that I can only hold my sides at

every fresh knot, and, indeed, become so helpless at last that Anak begs me to fetch from the school-room a cushion for Aunt to sit upon, and a comfortable mat for her feet. When these are arranged, and the stoutest of the ropes fixed as reins, Anak, leaving Solomon and the Squiffer in charge, goes indoors to make his toilette.

The best hat possessed by the family is well brushed and inked, a clean collar, whose points set fiercely up on either side of his chin, is produced, and buttoned on by Jill, while, against our better judgment, he persists in arraying himself in a plaid waistcoat, in the fob of which he places, with its attendant seals, the one relic of value with which we have never parted, viz., father's hunting watch, which is about as big as a moderate sized warming-pan.

When all is completed, he looks at himself over his shoulder, and pronounces the whole effect to be "fine."

But, alas! so intent have we been on adorning the upper stories of his corporeal dwelling-house, that we have entirely neglected his lower, consequently it is with a rude shock that our eyes fall on the carpet slippers with which he concludes.

His hoofs are far too big to be accommodated

by any of *our* boots, so he must e'en go in slippers, or stocking heels.

"I needn't get out, you know," he says, blankly, "and nobody'll see—but if they did, I could say I had got the gout, you know; people with gout always wear slippers, as every one knows."

"But if you don't go on to the platform," says Hetty, "*he* will snap up Aunt before you've time to look round; as you can't get out yourself, you must take somebody who can. Why don't you go, Dick?"

"Why don't you go yourself?" I say, "in that new jacket and hood of yours, folks would look at *you*, not Jemima."

"The Squiffer must go," says Jill, interposing, "he's so light and nimble, Mr. Titmarsh won't have a chance against him."

So the Squiffer is promptly scrubbed and made decent, and having done our utmost to embellish our envoys at our own expense, we descend to the courtyard, where the miserable Jemima waits, her attitude one of utter supineness and dejection.

As Anak majestically seats himself upon the board, it irresistibly occurs to us how much more capable he looks of carrying Jemima, than Jemima does of carrying him.

"Now for the carrot," says Anak, as if it were a

specific for all ills to which donkey flesh is heir, and, sure enough, after partaking of that delicacy, Jemima stands erect, and even lifts her tail.

Seizing this favourable moment, Anak, gathering up the ropes with an air, drives off, the Squiffer jumping nimbly up beside him, while our shouts of laughter pursue them both by way of a God-speed.

After which we fetch a rake, and carefully obliterating all traces of wheels, retire to the tallet to watch the march of events.

We do not find the time of waiting long, as we regale ourselves with anticipations of the treat in store for Mr. Titmarsh, and the discomfiture of the out-witted Marshall. Presently we hear him approaching, and, peeping carefully over from beneath the projecting eaves, we see him, quite unconscious of our vicinity, draw two keys from his pocket, and apply one of them to the stable door.

We can only see the top of his hat, but *that*, I swear, expresses a sniggering triumph. Listening intently, we are able to follow him accurately through the process of harnessing first White Bess, then Billy Button—the latter resenting the indignity by lashing out at him with as much sense and vigour as if he were a Christian.

He reappears presently, and goes whistling to-

wards the coach-house; and now that we can see his face, there *is* a smirk upon it. It vanishes simultaneously with the ceasing of his whistle, though, when he opens the coach-house door and looks within.

"O! Be sugared!" he cries, jumping back a step, and scratching his head; "whatever have those young warmints been up to with that cart?" he adds, in loud soliloquy; "I *were* a fool not to lock that door, too, but I know'd they'd got no pony, and unless they drored it themselves, the young asses"—(Marshall little knows how very nearly he has hit the mark)—"I didn't see how they was goin' a matter of ten miles. They've poked it away somewhere just to spite me—*darn 'em!*" he adds, piously, and departs to rummage every out-house in search of it.

We contain ourselves with difficulty, when presently he returns vociferating fearfully, and empty-handed. He proceeds to drag out the mail phaeton, and harness White Bess thereto, after which he locks the stable door, viciously, and puts the key in his pocket, thus extinguishing the golden idea which anon occurred to me of myself starting off on Billy to see some of the fun of the fair.

He has scarcely got into his drab overcoat, and arranged his hair by means of a pocket-mirror and

comb, when Mr. Titmarsh, who owns the one virtue of punctuality, appears upon the scene.

Mounting delicately to his place, he settles the rug about his legs, and gathers up the reins preparatory to starting.

"If you please, sir," says Marshall, touching his hat, "I can't take the spring cart, it's gone; but I daresay I can hire something at the station to ring back Miss Sieviking's luggage in."

"Is the pony gone too?" says Mr. Titmarsh, turning sharply, and in a voice of thunder; "I thought you told me you had locked the stable door?"

"So I did, sir, and Billy Button is in there all safe."

"Then jump up behind," says Mr. Titmarsh, recovering his equanimity; "I can bring back the light luggage with me, and you can follow with the rest."

Will he though? I'm inclined to think that it is *he* who will have to follow, not Marshall; and though he may bring her luggage back, we are very much mistaken if he brings our Aunt.

Puffed out with this pleasing hope, however, he drives off at a smart pace through the bright, beautiful morning; and when the echo of his carriage wheels have quite died away, we lie down on the hay, and *roll* in an agony of mirth and expectation, while Billy down below, at the sound of our voices, kicks up his heels responsive.

CHAPTER VIII.

She's backit like a peacock,
She's breastlit like a swan,
She's jimp about the middle,
Her waist ye weel may span.

A DISTANT sound of approaching wheels—wheels of the mail phaeton or the spring cart—which?

Up to this moment, betting has run high as to which equipage aunt will return in, Hetty and Solomon being convinced that the rope harness and Anak's carpet slippers will prove too much for even *her*, Jill and I affirming that she is not the good fellow we take her for, if she leaves him in the lurch, or makes him look any smaller than circumstances and Jemima have combined to make him look already.

The steps are White Bess's . . . they are turning in at the gates, they are here . . . we draw in our breaths, and lean through the open tallet door at the imminent risk of our necks . . . it is he, and—Pink May?

Scarcely. In the precise order in which he departed, Mr. Titmarsh has returned, himself before,

Marshall behind; he has not even a travelling bag to show as the fruits of his journey.

In one respect only is there an alteration, his face, but now so suave and genial, is perfectly white with rage, and it is with the iron hand of the coward and the bully that he saws at Bess's mouth as he pulls her up at the stable door.

The cigar is between his lips still, but it is out, and if our lives depended on it, we could not restrain the smothered giggle that escapes us at sight of his furious discomfiture.

The sound, slight as it is, reaches him, and, looking sharply up, in the act of descending, he beholds our four grinning countenances clustered high above him.

He sets his teeth hard, with a curse, or I'm much mistaken, the cigar falling, bitten in two, at his feet, then walks away into the house, while Marshall, with a faint twinkle in his eye, proceeds to unharness Bess, and lead her into the stable.

It is beneath our dignity to question him, though we are dying to know how Anak managed to achieve his brilliant victory, so when he comes out again, the twinkle having spread into a grin that embraces his whole countenance, we let him depart to the house unmolested.

It is not in reason to expect Jemima back for another good half hour, therefore we dispose ourselves to wait with such patience as we may. Imagine, therefore, our amazement when, at the end of ten minutes, we again hear the sound of approaching wheels, and precipitating ourselves down the tallet stairs, reach the courtyard in time to be rewarded by a Sight.

Standing up in the cart, his legs apart, his dilapidated hat cocked rakishly over one eye, his coat flung wide to give air, lavishly displaying the waistcoat and seals, his elbows squared and lifted to his ears, thereby hitching up his already short trousers to the extent of showing half-a-yard or so of striped stocking, with the most ineffable look of triumph on his naturally truculent countenance that mortal ever accomplished, comes Anak and his prize, drawing up at the stable door with such a flourish as almost lifts from his legs the luckless beast, whom, by some necromancy, he has persuaded into going five miles an hour.

Have you ever seen a real Paddy going to the races in a real shandydan? Because, if so, my description of Anak's appearance is wasted upon you, for you have already seen him.

"I've *got* her," he says, in a tone of the most intense complacency; and sure enough, though for

the moment we have scarcely seen our aunt, so completely does Anak fill the canvas, there she is, with ringlets out of curl, bonnet awry, a false plait bobbing down her back, an extravagant long-tailed gown that would amply cover all the six of us, yet with it all, our dear Pink May, whom we dearly love, and who dearly loves us.

"O! dear boys and girls," she cries, as half-a-dozen outstretched hands lift her down into our midst, while we all proceed to shower upon her energetic salutes, "how *rejoiced* I am to see you all again!"

"Upon my word you're smarter than ever," I say; "but why didn't you come back with *him?*"

"I'm afraid he is very angry," she says, looking grave, "but of course I couldn't come back with anybody but Anak;" and then she begins to giggle—and certainly none of us err on the side of silence, as in a body we escort her back to the house.

In the schoolroom, the Squiffer gives me a full, true and particular account of the morning's doings as follows.

"We walked nearly all the way," he begins, "and led Jemima, getting there about ten minutes before Mr. Titmarsh arrived. You should have seen his face when he saw Anak drawn up before the station

door, though I feel sure he thought he'd only come for the luggage, and just at that moment what should that wretched Jemima do but set up hee-hawing with all her might, which made everybody grin, though why folks should always smile when an ass uplifts his voice, and take no notice when a horse whinnies, I never could make out.

"Well, Mr. Titmarsh came on to the platform, and just as the train was signalled, he caught sight of—*me*.

"The train came in, I got to her before he did, but had only just time to tell her that Anak was waiting for her outside, when up came Mr. Titmarsh, with his best bow, and taking her shawls and things, offered her his arm to the carriage, throwing a word or two to me, in the style of the affectionate step-father, who had brought me to meet her.

"When we got outside, Mr. Titmarsh very adroitly contrived for her back to be turned to Anak, and was leading her towards the phaeton, when Anak, who was standing up in the cart, fearfully excited, jumped out of the cart, and just as Pink May had got her foot on the step, Anak clutched her hand and put it under his arm.

"'You're just coming along with *me*, aunt,' he said, and wheeled her round before she could draw breath.

"'Of course I am,' she said, not seeing the situation a bit; 'we're all going back together, there's just room for the four of us in the phaeton——"

"'I've brought a—a carriage for you,' said Anak, 'and——'

"'That is for the luggage,' said Mr. Titmarsh suavely (a lot of people had gathered round, and were looking on, grinning). "Allow me——' and he again endeavoured to assist her into the phaeton. 'Jump in behind, boys; Marshall can bring back the luggage in the, ah—cart.'

"'We shall go back as we came,' said Anak, nodding ferociously, 'except that Miss Sieviking will go with us—won't you, Aunt? That is to say, if you're not too proud;' and he pointed towards Jemima, who at that moment set up hee-hawing again with all her might.

"She looked past it, over it, everywhere but at it; then said, 'I don't see any carriage, dear!'

"'Well, then, the *cart*,' said Anak, sturdily, and thereupon took her up in his arms and lifted her bodily into it. Then up he got and drove off, actually getting a-head of Mr. Titmarsh,—I thought he would have *burst* with triumph!"

Here she comes, Kitty and Jill beside her, Marshall behind.

"Master's compliments," he says, "and he's

waiting dinner for Miss Sieviking and the family in the dining-room."

We stare at him as with one eye, scarcely believing the evidence of our ears.

"*He* is going to dine with *us?*" says the Squiffer, shrilly.

"Yes, sir; he's waiting for you, sir," and he throws the door open, and stands aside.

"*Good* Lord!" I say, "why there won't be enough mut——" I pause abruptly.

"Doesn't he always dine with you?" says Pink May, standing up and arranging her curls.

"Oh! of course," I say, drily, "and eats exactly the same food as we do; his appetite is not at all delicate—not in the least."

"I say!" says Anak, entering so hurriedly as to flatten Marshall against the wall, "White Bess is very ill—in a fit or something; you'd better go and see to her at once" (with a nod towards Marshall), "and tell Kitty to give her a bran mash while we're at dinner."

For a moment Marshall hesitates between two duties—to succour White Bess, or to wait on his master. Bess wins the day; he vanishes, Anak slipping out after him, returning breathless and complacent, just as the last of us is seating himself at table.

Grace pronounced, Mr. Titmarsh looks around him in such calm expectation of somebody appearing to remove the covers, that involuntarily the Squiffer hops up and performs that ceremony.

"Where is Marshall?" he inquires, in amazement, at the absence of that official; but we do not heed him, we are marvelling whence comes the comely turkey that sits at ease before him, and the noble sirloin of beef that graces the foot of the board?

Our flowers are all gone; our modest bit of mutton hides itself at the side of the table, while our pale and melancholy cheek occupies an abased position on the sideboard.

Mr. Titmarsh's suavity, temporarily mislaid on his return from the station, has quite returned; he beams upon us, the model of the courteous host, and affectionate step-father, from the head of the table, as he commences to carve, daintily, the dish before him.

"A small slice of turkey, my dear Miss Sievi-king?" he says. "March is very late for turkey, I admit, but these young people like something substantial."

"Oh, my!" says the Squiffer, in an audible aside; "dinner napkins!" and he appreciatively unfolds his, and sets to munching the piece of bread he finds inside it.

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"A little piece won't by any means do for *me*," says Anak, in the same tone, looking at the turkey with the eyes of a lover.

"Would you oblige me," says Mr. Titmarsh, addressing us generally, "by ringing the bell for Marshall?"

Anak rings with a will, but no Marshall appears.

"Doubtless he will be here directly," says the host, whose urbanity is not to be dashed by trifles. "Meanwhile, Miss Sieviking, allow me." And he rises, and makes his way to her with the delicately-carved slice of turkey, reaching her side at the same moment as Anak appears at the other, bearing a bit of mutton.

"Your favourite cut of mutton, Aunt," says Anak, repressing with difficulty the impulse to smack his lips, "with Yorkshire pudding, you know—Kitty made it on purpose for you."

"So it is," says Pink May, returning an eye of favour on the mutton, and a coquettish smile of refusal on Mr. Titmarsh; "and I never get such good mutton anywhere as I do here."

"Excuse our getting up from table," says Hetty, coming round with the potatoes, while the Squiffer bears the seakale, and Kitty brings up the rear with the Yorkshire pudding, "but we are used to waiting upon ourselves."

"And only too pleased to have anything to help ourselves to," says Solomon, producing the pepper and salt.

"A little turkey, my dear?" says Mr. Titmarsh to Hetty, keeping his temper, and struggling still to retain the post of master of ceremonies.

"No, thank you, sir," says Hetty, politely; "I'm afraid turkey is conducive to *fat*. A bit of cheek, if you please, Anak."

"Never mind the cheek," I say, handsomely, "you shall have some mutton, Hetty." And she does.

A whisper, exchanged between Anak and myself, and passed on by telegraphic signals to the Squiffer and Solomon, has determined *our* course of action, so that when Mr. Titmarsh, dissembling his rage, offers to me the oft-refused slice of turkey, I accept it (to the amazement of Jill and Hetty), at the same time mildly hinting that I could manage more slices than one.

I don't think he is used to carving; he has to stand over, and wrestle with the bird before he can deprive him of a leg, and it is almost with a look of despair that he again requests one of us to ring for Marshall.

"I'll see if I can't find him," says Anak, the willing, but presently returns, saying, "he can't see

him anywhere," which is strictly true, though, if he had told us all he had *heard* of that worthy, he would have retailed language as little likely to edify us as it is to benefit Bess and Billy Button, who at present are the sole recipients of it, as declaimed from the harness room into which Marshall is securely locked.

"He said he was going to the stable, as Bess was ill," says Pink May.

"But the stable door is locked," says Anak.

Mr. Titmarsh, struggling fiercely with a wing, answers nothing, though for the angry red that flashes into his face, Marshall will eventually, I think, have to pay.

Having helped me, he looks at the expectant countenances of Solomon and the Squiffer, and—blesses them.

"Beef?" he says, something of his fine veneer of politeness being scratched off by now, and signing towards the neglected sirloin, which wastes its sweetness on the desert air.

"Turkey," says Solomon, in a hollow voice, which, if his stomach matches, the whole of that bird would be but a sop thrown to it, not worthy of mention.

By the time the Squiffer is served, Anak is quite ready to have his plate refilled, and, when that is done, mine is also empty; and though he politely

expresses a hope that Mr. Titmarsh will take a mouthful himself before attending to us, the latter merely shakes his head (he is too furious by this time to trust himself to speak), and attacks the *corpus vile* before him more desperately than before.

After all, he has courage. I'm certain his arms are aching fit to drop off, and that he hasn't taken such severe exercise for years.

"It does give such a zest to one's appetite," says Anak, as he empties his second plate, "to know that what we're eating is *paid for!*—and now for the beef."

Not in vain has that bullock become beef, as Anak quickly proves. We can't beat him, but we are not far behind, and when at last the four of us lay down our knives and forks, an empty dish at the top of the table, an unsightly bone at the bottom, testify to the prowess of our teeth.

"That's the best tuck-out we've had since you came to Sieviking, sir," says Anak; "I wish you'd ask us to dine with you every day; don't you, Dick?"

Mr. Titmarsh, who has eaten his bit of turkey on a stone cold plate, vegetableless, sauceless, breadless, unable, through his labours, to get in a word with our Aunt, who is indeed so amazed at our

gastronomic feats as to do nothing but stare at us, fascinated, now sees his way, and beaming benignantly upon us, says, in an affectionate manner:

"I am only too pleased for you to enjoy yourselves, my dear young people; indeed it positively makes me feel quite *young* again to see it."

"Only, perhaps, when *you* were young, you weren't kept on such short commons as we are," says Anak (really frankness is very indecent); "even if we'd got it, we couldn't eat as much as this every day, you know."

"I should think not," says aunt, who looks, I fancy, somewhat shocked.

We must seem gluttons to her, and no mistake.

"Are you quite sure that you have finished?" says Mr. Titmarsh, with no sarcasm in his voice; "as if so, *Kitty*, perhaps, will remove the dishes."

Anak again undertaking the part of Mercury, our sole female domestic makes her appearance. She has a dish-clout over one shoulder, a duster adorns the other; she comes in like a lion, and rampages, so to speak, among the dishes, serving Mr. Titmarsh, for instance, though late in the day, with vegetables—over his shirt front.

Having plumped a rhubarb pie down opposite Mr. Titmarsh, and a pudding opposite Hetty, she retires to the sofa, seats herself upon it, and with

crossed arms, and eyes fixed upon the ceiling, awaits further orders.

Mr. Titmarsh surveys her for a moment in petrified silence, then—

"You can go, Mrs. Kitty," he says, "we will ring for you when I require you."

"Am I to go, Miss Jill?" she says, still intent on the ceiling.

"Yes, if you please, Kitty."

She vanishes with a whirl, a bump, and a bang, the latter causing Mr. Titmarsh to hold his head between his hands for a full minute. He does look very pale, to be sure; one might pity him if one had not, through him, smarted severely in one's pocket,—the most feeling portion of the human belongings.

Pink May looks at him with a certain pity, and at us, I think, with disapprobation.

Yes, he is right in calling us savages, for savages we are, pure and simple. Why cannot we, for the nonce, bury the hatchet as gracefully as he does, and, if only for the sake of our visitor, permit things to go smoothly?

But we cannot. We are truthful and straightforward to an extent that must appear to him simply brutal, and we never had any manners with which to smooth away the force of our natural failing.

Therefore, when we have cleared the dessert at one fell swoop, and drunk our glass of ginger wine apiece, finding it as impossible to talk to aunt before *him*, as it evidently is for him to properly exercise his fascinations before *us*, we retire in a body, leaving him master of the field.

Once outside the door, away we go, free as air, with a mighty "Whoop!" for which the turkey and beef are mainly responsible. Our spirits run high, for why should we not dine as well to-morrow at his expense as we have done to-day?

And, if by encouraging his little attentions, Pink May can assure to us many more of such feasts, why, we will put it to her in the conclave bye-and-bye, to be held in the school-room, that it would be downright cruelty to *us*, to positively discourage them.

CHAPTER IX.

"When devils do their blackest deeds put on
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows."

HALF-AN-HOUR, an hour, two hours go by, and still Pink May comes not.

We have grown tired of waiting for her in the school-room, and one by one have not scorned to take a peep at her through the window, the whole of one hand, the half of her cap, and a good portion of her peacock-like train being full in view.

Once, or I'm much mistaken, I see a pocket-handkerchief lifted to her face, and presently Anak falls back upon us breathless with the intelligence that Mr. Titmarsh has got her hand.

Jointly and severally we refuse to believe him, but by the testimony of our own eyes are convinced; there is his sickly paw enfolding her little rheumatic one, while she, well, may we blush for her, permits it.

We never meant his little attentions to go so far as that.

"It's my belief," says Anak, in tones of awe, "that he's *proposing* to her!"

Ousting him from the place of honour, I perceive that Mr. Titmarsh's hand has come to assist its fellow, and that between them he is stroking Aunt's very softly and tenderly, finally relinquishing it, as though it were an egg, and might break.

"What *lies* he must have been telling her!" I ejaculate, and at that moment perceive that she is standing up to depart, so we all rush back to the school-room to receive her.

We hear her long train with its dozens of steel buttons banging against the walls on either side, as she comes; but when the door at last opens to admit her, we do not, as usual, hasten to meet and surround her.

"We had quite given you up," I say, politely placing a chair for her. "Mr. Titmarsh's society is evidently too agreeable to be left in a hurry; but, of course, if you came on a visit to him, not us, we shall know what to expect in future."

Poor Pink May, with a blush, and simper, and shame all in one on her faded cheek, trifles with the follies on her watch chain, and looks down. "Your cap is all on one side, aunt," says Anak, "and your nose is as red as your ribbons. Have you been *crying?*"

She puts up her morsel of a handkerchief to the little turned-up nose that in her youth must have

marred all pretensions to beautyship, and in honest concern cries, "*Is* it red?"

"Very," I say, briefly, "but what have you been talking about—us?"

"I have been upset, dears," she says, jumping as it were at my question, "I have been hearing all about things—and they seem in a sad state, though poor Mr. Titmarsh has been doing everything in his power to right them."

"As it is all his doing, he ought to be able, if any one is," I say. "May we enquire what he proposes to do?"

"Things have come to such a pitch, he says that he declines to have the sole responsibility of your affairs on his hands any longer. He has asked me to furnish him with the addresses of the principal members of the family, that he may request them to meet the family lawyer here, and decide on what is best to be done."

"We will write our own letters, thank you," I say, proudly, "and he is rather late in the day with his hint about our lawyer; he was written to weeks ago, and may be here any day. And you are not surprised to find that we are beggars?"

"I was quite knocked down by the intelligence," says Pink May. "I *cried*, for though I had thought for some time things wern't quite straight, I had no

idea of this; but it seems it has been going on ever since your poor father died, hard as Mr. Titmarsh has tried to economise and retrench."

"Have you any more fables to tell us, aunt!" I say, laughing bitterly, "because, if so, tell us them as fables, but don't expect us to believe them."

"I do not think you are fair to him," says Pink May, with some rebuke in her tone; "indeed, I have seen enough of your behaviour to-day to be sure that you are not—you make no allowance for his broken health and spirits, and should remember that, even if he is not always in your midst, he never ceases to labour for your welfare."

"The results of such labour are certainly brilliant," I say, looking round, "but go on, aunt."

"He says he knows he is looked upon as an interloper here, that he would long ago have relieved you of his presence, but that he knew he could serve you best by staying; now, however, that no further efforts of his can stave off the end, he means to accept a post offered him abroad."

"As what?" I enquire.

"Missionary."

"He is perfectly safe," says Anak. "No one, not even a Zulu, could stomach *him*."

"He means to work and slave night and day for *you*," says Pink May, the tears dripping down her

red nose; "he has spent all his little savings here in trying to retrieve things, and will have to begin the world over again; but he says he does not mind that, he would be more than satisfied if you would give him a little . . *l* . . *love*" . . .

She is sobbing now, her ringlets meeting over her nose, her Dolly Varden cap eclipsing her left eyebrow, the queerest little outside, with the warmest lining to it, that ever left the hands of the Creator.

"Poor soul!" says Anak, giving her such a pat on the back as sets all her little gewgaws dancing a jig; "she can't help it if he is more than a match for her, can she?"

"I suppose he will want to receive our *love* personally," I say dryly; "does he propose to return?"

"When he, and all of you, have made enough money to keep up Sieviking decently, you will all live here again together; meanwhile, he proposes it should be let for a term of years."

"He has arranged it all very nicely," I say, quietly.

"And was it because he was so sorry for *us* that he held your hand so long, aunt?" says the Squiffer, fixing his little sharp eyes on her face.

Pink May starts violently, and her cheeks become as red as her nose.

"There!" cries Anak, in one of his loud whispers, "I told you so—he's *popped*."

"Are we to look upon you as our future stepmother, aunt?" I enquire gravely.

"*Dear* boys and girls!" she cries deprecatingly, "who ever thought of such a thing? But he says he has always had a great regard for me; it seems he saw me once at a ball when I was a young girl"—("He must have been there in the capacity of waiter," I mutter. She draws herself up, and looks down)—"when my complexion was so exceedingly delicate, that I always went by the name of Pink May, and he never forgot me, you know" . . .

"That *was* a stroke of genius," I say, in unconscious soliloquy. "How we have underrated that man, to be sure."

"He remembers the very dress I wore," continues Pink May; "pale pink crape, with blush roses."

"Aunt," says Anak, fixing her with his eye, "did he *kiss* you?"

"O! Anak," she cries, looking really shocked, "how can you?——"

"Because if he had," says Anak, lighting a tallow candle, and marching up to her, "we could none of us ever have kissed you again, that's all. Not that I suppose it would be any great loss. Good night."

CHAPTER X.

"Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins . . .
Families by tens and dozens."

"SOME people begin small, and end up big—others begin big and end up small. *We've* done the latter," says Hetty, sighing.

"If only father had invested in the Three per Cents.," says Jill.

"Or, as I said to Mr. Titmarsh last night," puts in Pink May, who has been politely sent to Coventry, and sits, the image of dejection, a little apart, "if only my poor dear sister were alive now, how different everything would be, to be sure!"

I smile grimly, wondering if he felt grateful for a wish that struck so profoundly at the root of his *raison d'être.*

"What I want to know is," I say, looking round, "whether we are doing any good by writing these letters to people who never came near us when we were respectable, and who are not likely to wish to contaminate themselves now we are beggars."

"Something must be arranged—some provision

made for you, dear boys and girls," says Pink May, hesitatingly.

"You mean that we are to be distributed among the family as foundlings, I suppose," I cry fiercely, "but that we never will be, as long as we have the use of our hands."

"Never!" echoes Anak, "so long as there's a crossing to be swept, or an honest penny to be earned by holding a horse."

"I see no good in it," I pursue; "if they come, *he* will only sugar them over and make fools of them, as he has done of other people, and we shall be insulted and deluged with good advice, and nothing else. We will write no letters to anyone," and I tear in half the sheet of paper before me.

"I think, dears," says Pink May, meekly, "that Mr. Titmarsh himself has already written."

As she speaks, the March wind rushes in at the open window, and tosses to the ceiling the torn bits of paper.

"How did he get all the addresses?" I ask, sternly.

"He wrote them down last night," she falters out, but I turn from her in contempt. Verily, our weapon in which we trusted, has become a tool in the hands of the enemy.

"Jill—Anak—all of you," I say, "take your pens and write what I dictate. Are you ready?"

"It was a beautiful letter that he wrote," murmurs Pink May, "and speaking so nobly and well of all of you!"

"'The Sieviking family present their compliments to their relations, and respectfully beg to inform them, that having been able in their prosperity to support existence without them, they have good hopes of also being able to do so in their adversity. Any invitation tendered by Mr. Titmarsh will not be recognised by the Sievikings, although he is at liberty to invite whoever he pleases to his own portion of the house.' That's all, now direct the envelopes, and stamps we will find, though we part with our front teeth to buy them."

"Dick," says Jill, "do you think this is wise? We elder ones can work, but how about Hetty, and the Squiffer, and Solomon? We must not throw away their chances blindfold."

"Are they any more likely to do anything for us now than they have been these last few years?" I cry. "Have they ever concerned themselves about us, or known, or sought to know, whether we were hungry or miserable—living or dead? The only two good souls who really love us are far away."

"And don't *I* love you, Dick?" cries poor Pink May, in tears.

"Yes, yes!" I say, somewhat softened, "but you are a silly little thing, aunt; it's no good crying about it, though. Try and have more sense in future."

"But—but," she says, "surely you will not send that to your sisters? And Mr. Titmarsh has of course written to *them*."

"No, I will write differently to them. They are careless and forgetful, but they can't help being great ladies, poor souls! If Hetty had got twenty-four silk gowns, and a mantle and bonnet to wear with each of them, I've no doubt they'd be very good sisters indeed to her—as sisters go."

"*I'll never* go and stop with either of them again unless I've got a new box and decent boots," cries Hetty, her cheeks an angry crimson; "it's bad enough to be poor, but it's awful to know people are *ashamed* of you!"

"Well, that sack you took with you last time *was* rather a twister," says Anak, judicially, "and that wretched flunkey *would* take the confounded thing round the neck—we should have done better to stick to the shawls and the brown paper."

"It must be trying to have one's own sister worse dressed than one's maid," says Jill, shaking

her head; "we are delf, our married sisters are china. It's no good for us to attempt to swim down the stream together."

Hetty tosses her head. It is so pretty an one that I am inclined to think Jill is wrong, and that our youngest sister will some day hold up her head with the best of the pipkins, and ride the waves as boldly as any.

"They will all be furious at our sending them such a letter," says Jill, "but—they will come."

"Let them," I say indifferently, "though what they are coming for, I don't know. If *he* says we are ruined (and he ought to be the best judge of his own work), why we are, and talking won't mend it. The real point is, what are we going to do?"

"Work," says Anak, squaring his shoulders. "Why, I can carry a weight of——"

"In short, you can do a porter's work," I say, interrupting him, "while I can't do even that; Jill can make herself useful, and darn socks; Hetty look pretty, and make bonnets; the Squiffer and Solomon satisfactorily perform all the functions of young animals. Behold the materials with which we are going to face the world, and beat it!"

"O! it is all very fine to talk about porters," says Anak, scowling; "there is the Natal Mounted Police that you get into by just *strength* and nothing

else; you go early before the doors are open, and when they are thrown back, you fight your way in shoulder to shoulder, and those that get in first are appointed. And it is very good pay, ten pounds a month—of course I should send every penny home."

"Until you get potted by a Zulu, old fellow," I say, thinking how ill we could spare the brother whose somewhat rough exterior covers the tenderest heart, the gentlest spirit that ever had life breathed into it by God. "And then where should we be? Think of coming down from all the luxuries furnished by ten pounds a month, to nothing at all!"

"Mausolus King of Caria," says Solomon, instructively, "once filled his empty exchequer by compelling all his subjects to shave their heads, and then sold them wigs which they were ready to buy at any price to cover their shining polls with. If we all encouraged our hair to grow, we might earn an honest penny at least once a month by letting the barber crop us."

"That must be our last resource," says Anak, leaning back, and passing his hands through his abundant locks; "it is to our pleasing appearances that we must look for such substantial advantages as rich husbands, and—and wives."

A shout of laughter follows this speech. "In

short," I say, drily, "marriage is the only profession open to us, for it is the only one that can be entered without a preliminary apprenticeship, and without money."

"One good match would be the saving of us," says Anak, gloomily, "if only some old boy, none of your hale young fellows of fifty and sixty, but a real *old* 'un would take a fancy to Hetty now. Why, my dear girl"—he throws his arm around her affectionately—"all you would have to do would be to *fix* him, marry him on the spot, polish him off, put on a widow's cap and—enjoy yourself!" Hetty, however, declines the honour, on the ground that she thinks it would be rather more fun *for us*, than for *her*.

"Or who knows but some antediluvian old fossil mayn't take a fancy to aunt? I'm sure after the encouragement given you by Mr. Titmarsh, aunt——" says Anak, turning round, then stops abruptly; he is addressing an empty chair.

Our great shout of laughter a minute ago must have blown her out of the door, or the window. Probably the latter, as on looking through it, we espy her at the end of the espalier walk, and by her side Mr. Titmarsh, who is gracefully indicating to her, as an object of natural curiosity, one of the clustered nosegays of the pear tree.

"He's pumping her as to what we are going to do," cries Anak, energetically; "I'll go and spoil sport by listening to every word he says——"

"Stay where you are," I say, "and see if you can manage to contribute an idea to the general good. One thing is very certain, we can't remain here, and there is only one place to which we can go—London."

"London!" cries Anak, all the ruddy colour dashed from his cheek, "where we shall never get a breath of pure air, never see a green leaf, or get a smell of the woods or earth—why, I'd fifty times rather stay and earn a shilling a day, than go to live in *London!*"

"I daresay you would," I say, drily, "but that would be indulging yourself, not advancing your family in any way. Now let us look our position straight in the face and see what is best to be done. Here we are at the outset of life, through no fault of our own—ruined. Now, are we going to waste our breath by crying over spilt milk, or shall we put forth our whole energies and strength to reverse the edict that Fate has apparently passed against us? Do we decide to remain lawless, idle vagabonds living from hand to mouth, taking no thought for the morrow, or do we resolve to order our lives frugally, even painfully, with the one object stead-

fastly before our eyes of regaining Sieviking, to live in it decently, some day, as our forefathers did before us? Are we prepared to make every sacrifice to that one aim, to work, each one not for his individual good, but for the restoration of the family home and honour? I think this present adversity is just the touchstone that will determine our characters for good or evil, and that the real grit in us will come out, making us either proud or ashamed of one another."

I paused for a moment in my speech, but as they all crowd round me, I hold my hand up, for I have not yet done.

"Brothers—sisters—unless things turn out very differently to what I believe them to be, we have a hard, even a desperate, struggle before us. All the best years of our lives must go towards making good the loss inflicted by one bad man, and we *will* make it good, if Sieviking hands and hearts, and spirits are worth anything. We shall want a purpose and a patience alike invincible, a dogged faith that no experience can break, a power of imagination that will enable us to see dreams when Hope herself fails us, a fortitude in the endurance of the hourly pin-pricks of poverty that approaches to heroism. All this we shall require—brothers—sisters, can you give it?"

"We can—we can—" they cry. But as I look from one to the other, I know that on two only can I rely—my trusty henchman, Anak, and my faithful friend and sister, Jill.

"It is possible that charity may be offered to us," I go on, "that a cold corner of a hearth, and some bitter unearned bread may be placed at the disposal of one or another of us, and he who has a mind for such alms let him take them and be grateful, but never let him look to have lot nor part in the restoration of the family glory, reared and builded through the burthen and heat of the day, by the rest. Poor as we are and have been, we are yet independent; we have made no complaints, asked no favours, not accepted any, and in every way have shown ourselves fitter to bear the badge of poverty, than that of servitude."

I pause for a moment to note the pride of regard, the air of liberty, worn alike by all our father's children, and cannot picture my young brothers and sisters as slaves to the will of selfish benefactors.

"Now shall we be the faggot of sticks, broken singly, by the world, or, remaining entire, shall we defy and overcome it? We start heavily handicapped in the race, by extreme youth and ignorance, but if we resolve never to miss an opportunity likely to

bring us an inch nearer our goal, and invariably to do a little more than our duty, we shall *win*."

"We will—we will—" they cry aloud, with tears of hope and sorrow splashing their cheeks, as April-like a shower as that now falling out yonder, and spangling with pearl the promise of the old pear-tree bough.

"And if we fail," I add, in a lower key, "God being against us—we shall at least have done our best, have worn, not have rusted out our lives."

"And shall we be *very* old when we come home again to Sieviking, Dick?" says Hetty, whose lovely head has nestled down against my right shoulder, while Jill's practical one occupies the left.

"Very. You will be an old maid by that time, Hetty."

"And mayn't one ever have a sweetheart, Dick?"

"If he's of the right sort, and sees you in your poverty—not dressed up in borrowed plumes among your fine relations."

"And may Jill?" says Hetty, pouting.

"No; Jill's my property. I can't part with her."

"How much shall we have to live on?" says

Anak, briskly, taking out pencil and paper. "I suppose there will be *something*."

"What we may get for the Court, I should say, and nothing else. If anyone takes it, which is not likely, we might get a hundred a year—not a penny more."

"And we should have to *live* upon that!" cries Hetty in dismay; "feed, clothe, house, and educate ourselves upon one hundred pounds a year!"

"And precious lucky we may think ourselves if we get it," says Anak, nodding. "Remember the gentleman of Johnson's acquaintance who considered that 'thirty pounds a year was enough to enable a man to live without being contemptible.'"

"He allowed sixpence for dinner, and a penny for breakfast," says the Squiffer, taking up the parable, "and by spending a penny a day he might be for several hours in very good company, and do without supper. On clean shirt days he should go abroad *to pay visits*."

"We shan't be very welcome as visitors," says Hetty, resting her blooming face on her hands; "we shall become like the priest mentioned by Lorry, so thin and dry in all our articulations that our joints will crack loudly every time we move, and frighten people out of their wits. We can never afford sixpence a day for dinner, you know."

"We'll *make* some money," cries Anak, with avidity; "we'll take the public by the nose, and compel it to fill our empty pockets, whether it will or no. We'll start a new pickle, or pill—there's a first-rate opening for a good sound family pill, advertised in some strikingly new and original manner. For instance, why should we not utilise our numbers by walking as sandwiches down Regent Street with 'Don't look at my back!' on one side, and a gigantic pill (we can call it the Sieviking Pill) on the other?"

"That's copyright," says Jill; "the other I mean, not the pill, and it's too late to think of picking Cockle up now."

"A mission for reforming gutter children is a fine thing," continues Anak, "or a good breach of promise case or two for the girls; but no, I think it will be more to your advantage on the whole to be a *widow*, Hetty!"

After all, save Jill, they do not understand. There runs through my mind the verse, "When I was a child I spoke as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things." I go to the window and look out, Anak following. Mr. Titmarsh and Pink May have just come into sight again; they are bobbing and bowing to each other like two Mandarins. Some of the fun

and frolic of the March wind has surely got into their old veins, and is making them as frisky as the lambs in the meadow out yonder.

"I shouldn't wonder," says Anak meditatively, "if we had some cornet-playing to-night; indeed"—he sniffs up the air as though there were music, the best of its kind, in it—"Pink May's behaviour is so outrageously abominable that I feel perfectly certain we *shall* hear the cornet played to-night."

CHAPTER XI.

"Their beds are made in the heavens high,
Down at the foot of our good Lord's knee,
Weel set about wi' gilly flowers;
I wot sweet company for to see."

I DON'T know why the espalier walk should elect to rush out into a superb arcade of rose and white in a single night, but surely where yesterday we saw but close-folded pinkish buds, this morning we discover a million striped and tufted shells spread to the sun, no two alike, but nipped, freaked, and patched with colour as the fruit itself will be by-and-bye. Mr. Pitt, his hands behind him, buzzes from one blossom to another like a bumble bee just born, who has dreamt of honey, but never yet tasted it.

Happy man! Having decently, and in order, arranged a winding-sheet about our family affairs, and with much legal circumlocution informed us that we are beggars, he is able to step out into the sunshine and merge our clouded lives completely in —apple-blossoms.

A distant rumble of wheels, a clattering of steps,

a double knock that severely tries the capacities of our ancient knocker, then silence, for we are too far off to hear footsteps.

"Arrival number one," I say, selecting a letter from a pile that lies before me; "Aunt Theodosia. To be sure, bankruptcy has its social advantages—she never drove twenty miles to see us before, and probably never will again."

"She hasn't come to see *us*," says Anak, "but the satin furniture. What did she say about it?"

"H'm—h'm," I say, glancing it over; "she had received our insolent letter, and a charming one from that delightful, ill-used man, Mr. Titmarsh. She is not surprised to hear we are ruined. What could be expected when people had ten children when they could not afford more than three? She supposes the suite of Esterhazy-brown satin having been so long in use would be sold cheap, especially to a relative, and she thinks she could get one of the younger boys into the Bluecoat School."

"Anything else?" cries Anak, snapping his fingers violently. "And as to the furniture, why the Chancellor shall have it first, or I'm a Dutchman."

"Uncle Tobias won't come," says Hetty, who has a spray of apple-blossom at her white neck; "he says that the last time he was here, one of us pulled

a chair from under him, and that his spinal cord has never been right since."

"Which little piece af amusement cost us exactly thirty thousand pounds," I say, drily. "While for the luxury of hitching off Uncle Golightly's wig with the fishing-tackle, we have paid at least another ten."

"There *is* Uncle Golightly!" says Anak, as a pompous knock rumbles down the passage. "Mr. Titmarsh will have all his work cut out to bamboozle *him*."

"Nothing of the sort," I say; "he will set him and John James by the ears, and get a rise out of both. If he's proved himself too much for Mr. Pitt, he will be more than a match for all the rest."

"Talk of an angel," says Hetty, as a brisk, jubilant rat-tat makes itself heard, "here we are! We shall enter on tiptoe, and smiling. We shall make a joke that will set everybody's teeth on edge, and then we shall sit down hastily, either on our own, or somebody else's hat."

"Where's Pink May?" I inquire, looking round. "She never means to face Aunt Theodosia surely!"

"Doesn't she though!" says Hetty, nodding. "She's got on a pink Dolly Varden cap, and all her rings and *châtelaines*, and a tail twice as long as herself, and off she has gone to the dining-room

to look after the dear boys' and girls' interest, she says."

"I would give something to see the passage-at-arms between them."

"There, they have all arrived now; Marshall is fetching Mr. Pitt."

The old man goes into the house at last, looking back often at his apple-blossoms.

"What humbugs relations are!" I say, with disgust; "they always advise but they never *do* anything. There is an ossification of the heart peculiar to relatives alone when money affairs are mentioned —above all temples where they congregate should be inscribed, 'All peace abandon ye who mention —money.' You are welcome to their homes, their hearths, all, so long as you don't want anything, but when you menace their pockets, they simply shrivel up."

"A quarter of an hour for lies and flattery," says Anak, looking at the clock, "five minutes Madeira, another five for Mr. Pitt's statement, and we shall be sent for."

"And do you mean to go, Dick?" says Jill, timidly.

"Yes."

"But," cries Hetty in dismay, "I thought you did not mean to go into the room—we are worse

than usual to-day. What *will* Aunt Theodosia say?"

"Your frock *is* short, certainly," says Anak, judicially, "but your ankles are good, and it's never indecent to show your ankles unless they are bad ones. And you needn't stand upright, you know; you can stoop a bit."

A discreet knock at the door—enter Marshall.

"Mr. Titmarsh's love, and will all you young ladies and gentlemen step into the dining-room directly?"

"Keep the love for yourself, and we'll come when we're ready," says Anak, fiercely.

"Come along, Jill," I say, and with her half-mended sock on her arm, she puts her hand in mine, and we set out together.

Marshall flings wide the dining-room door, but we advance such a very short way inside, that it is shut with some difficulty upon the *queue* formed by the younger ones.

"Here are our young people," says Mr. Titmarsh, advancing affectionately towards us; "come in, my dear children!" And he lays his hand on Jill's stockinged arm to lead her towards the relatives who sit in a semi-circle round the window.

Jill shakes off his hand as though it were a caterpillar, and does not stir a step.

"You sent for us," I say, addressing the semicircle, "and we are here."

For three seconds Aunt Theodosia surveys us through her eye-glass in petrified silence, a space of time appropriated by the irrepressible John James to a glance of delighted admiration at Hetty, and the exclamation of "Gad! what a fine girl," while Hetty, drawing herself up to give him a glance of withering scorn, suddenly recollects her legs and doubles up again.

"Are these my *nieces*, my *nephews*, that I behold before me?" says Aunt Theodosia, in a sepulchral voice.

"Bless my soul! things have come to a pretty pass indeed," says Uncle Golightly, staring at us.

"We are very poor here," says Mr. Titmarsh, looking down sadly at his own threadbare coat and continuations (can he have hired them for the occasion from the Chancellor?). "The utmost that we can do is to try and be *neat*——"

"I don't see any very strenuous attempts towards tidyness among these young people," says Aunt Theodosia, glancing severely from Mr. Titmarsh's shabby neatness to our unabashed raggedness. "I always hated finery (she transfixes with her eyeglass Pink May's gewgaws), and I never could endure coloured ribbons (another raking stare); a *figure*

chiffonnée has ever been my abhorrence—but the poorest person can be neat, and should be."

"It is a duty to oneself and society," says Col. Golightly, whose eyeglass has come to a full stop opposite poor Hetty.

"Tidy people are usually respectable," says Lady Theodosia, "and my sister-in-law"—she glances towards the panel upon where mother hangs with waist

"Jimp as a willow wand,"

and a cap with gauze strings that modestly strive to hide her bust—"was not a tidy person."

"Consequently her descendants are not respectable," puts in John James, as if to himself.

"And *les convenances*," continues Aunt Theodosia, calmly, "were never sufficiently regarded here. I have made it my rule through life to observe the decencies of society. Manners maketh man and woman. The late Sir Peter was in many respects peculiar, and frequently he would sit at table with me for days together without speaking a word, but if he forgot his manners, I did not mine, but used to say to him, 'Can I send you a little more gravy, Sir Peter?' or, 'Do you take stuffing?' And the consequence is that appearances were always kept up—my name has never come before the world save as a respected wife, while my comforts have been always assured to me."

"Let us live and die respectable," murmurs John James, ecstatically.

"Now my sister-in-law," says that Aunt Theodosia, turning a withering glance on the irrepressible Tommy, "not being neat herself, did not inculcate neatness in her children. And I always hold that the mind is a distinct reflection of the body, thus the deplorable slatternliness visible among these young people to-day indicates to me a moral confusion that augurs but ill for their future."

"When you have quite finished your homily on neatness, ma'am," I say patiently, "we shall be glad to know what your business is with us, for I believe it was you who sent for us here."

"What!" cries Aunt Theodosia, sitting erect, "am I to have the words taken out of my mouth—to be dictated to by this jackanapes? Are you aware, sir, that but for your Uncle Golightly and myself you would absolutely be compelled to *starve?* And this is gratitude!"

"When anything substantial is offered us," I say calmly, "I hope we shall know how to receive it. Meantime, we are obliged by your proposal about the Bluecoat School, and regret that none of us are able to accept it."

"Quite impossible!" says Pink May, shaking her

curls. "You would be certain to catch a cold walking about without any hat, you know!"

"Beggars cannot afford colds," says Uncle Golightly severely; "but I suppose they are looking to their married sisters to provide for them."

"I'm much mistaken if their hopes are not disappointed in *that* quarter. Two more extravagant, heedless young women I never knew; they'll ruin their husbands' estates before they're done. I see accounts of their receptions in the *Morning Post*, and every imaginable folly—why are they not here to-day?" says Aunt Theodosia.

None of us deign to reply; but Pink May, who is not proud, throws her little bedecked form into the breach.

"There is a drawing-room to-day," she says, nodding. "Bell wears gold brocade and pearls; Cynthia white velvet, Mechlin lace and diamonds. I am inclined to think it rather too heavy for her style of beauty, and Hetty thinks so too."

"And pray were any offers of *assistance* made?" says Aunt Theodosia with a snort of disgust.

"Of course. Hetty and Jill were to go and stay with them as long as ever they liked, to be sure, and to take several ball and dinner dresses, as they would probably go out a great deal this spring."

"What inconsiderate selfishness!—what folly!"

cries Aunt Theodosia uplifting her hands; "and the girls have *accepted* these invitations?"

"No, ma'am," I say calmly; "we are none of us fine enough for paying visits just now."

"Though I could easily have lent them some of my dresses," says Pink May, spreading out her peacock tail, "and with a little alteration——"

"They would do to go to Court in," says Aunt Theodosia, crushingly.

"Miss Sieviking is our guest, ma'am," I say, quietly, "and you will have the goodness, while you are in our house, to treat her with respect."

"Poor little popinjay—it *is* a shame!" mutters John James, *sotto voce*.

"A glass of Madeira, my *dear* Lady Theodosia?" says Mr. Titmarsh, anxiously. "Don't allow these young people to upset you; it is merely their unfortunate manner, they mean well."

"I hope I know my duty," says Aunt Theodosia, cleverly combining a scathing look at me, with one of gratitude to Mr. Titmarsh, "and no amount of insolence and ingratitude shall prevent my doing it. Such selfishness as that displayed by my married nieces must arouse indignation in every noble mind. A visit! Pshaw! the offer only merits contempt; but one of something handsome and permanent now—an offer that would provide for one of these poor

creatures, what would you say to that, brother Golightly?"

"I should say it was handsome, very handsome indeed of you, sister," says Uncle Golightly, and Mr. Titmarsh murmurs just audibly, "Noble, indeed!"

"What is the use of relatives unless they can help one another in time of trouble?" says Aunt Theodosia, largely and generously, her plum-coloured bonnet strings thrown back, her very mantle exhaling benignity and almsgiving. "For my part, I am willing to take charge of my niece Geraldine, to feed, clothe, and house her—for nothing."

"Noble—most noble!" murmurs Mr. Titmarsh.

"Very handsome, indeed," assents Uncle Golightly.

"You can mend?" says Aunt Theodosia sharply to Jill.

"Yes."

"And sew and cut out and make dresses?"

"Not very well."

"Ah!" dissatisfiedly; "that's a pity. My dressmaker's bills are dreadful—but you can be taught. You are an early riser?"

"Yes."

"And can dust china, I hope?"

"I suppose so."

Jill looks suddenly up at me. I answer her with a smile.

"*Apropos* of china," says Aunt Theodosia, with an abrupt change of tone, "I think I will buy in the Dresden dinner service before the sale; having been in use so many years, of course it would go cheap."

"There's not much of it left," says Jill, honestly.

"What!" cries the lady, "it is all broken up—you have actually *used* it?"

"Our common service was all broken, and we had no money to buy new—so we have been using the Dresden these two years."

"Goths! Vandals!" screams Aunt Theodosia; "and the silver plate—is *that* gone too?"

"Kit and Will sold it for what it would fetch when they went abroad. They asked Mr. Titmarsh for some of their money, but he would not give them any, so we gave them leave to take it."

"*You* gave them leave!" screams Aunt Theodosia. "O! the idiots! the owls! the apes! Worth a thousand pounds if it was worth a penny! and here you are wanting bread, and I suppose eating out of——"

"Pewter," says Anak.

"And all squandered in drink," says Uncle Golightly, "if half the tales I hear of those young men are true."

"I don't believe everything that I hear, sir," I say, calmly; "for instance, we have heard droll stories about yourself when you were young, but they may be false."

"Of how your man-servant hunted everywhere for your breeches one morning before you were up, and couldn't find them anywhere, because you had *got them on!*" says Anak, severely; "and how you insisted on sitting through the window one night, because you were positive it was a *chair!*"

"I positively must interfere," says Mr. Titmarsh, emphatically; "I will *not* stand by to see Colonel Golightly so wantonly insulted."

"Then you can leave the room," I say, quietly.

"And is the Esterhazy satin furniture gone *too?*" cuts in Aunt Theodosia, angrily, her face as deeply plum-coloured as her strings.

"I believe not," I say indifferently; "but it will be sold with the rest of the effects. There will be no buying-in beforehand by anybody."

"And this is gratitude!" says Aunt Theodosia, hysterically. Then, recovering herself, "So you know you *are* ruined, and to what extent?"

"Surely he who has wrought our ruin should be accurately aware of its scope. He informed our aunt that it was complete, and last night Mr. Pitt corroborated his statement."

I advance to the table, and stand beside the elderly man who has hitherto appeared so immersed in his papers as to be totally unaware of our presence.

"Sir," I say—and at the sound of my voice he looks up—"are you afraid to say before these persons what you said to me in confidence last night? Can, and will you for once drop the cold, cautious lawyer in the honest, truth-speaking man who hates theft and oppression, and will speak his mind as if no such thing as a law for libel existed? If so, tell us your plain opinion of that swindler before you."

For a moment it seems as though I had flashed some of my own righteous scorn and anger into him. His eye kindles, a faint colour touches his cheek, fiery words seem to tremble on his lips, then his face chills as it were, and when he speaks it is as the business automaton, not the man.

"There is not a tittle of proof against Mr. Titmarsh," he says, "not one tittle."

"So you told me last night," I say, sternly, "but that you were as morally certain of his guilt as I am. Do you deny it? Drop the lawyer for one moment if you can, and speak as man to man—do you deny it?"

"You are a very vehement young man," says Mr. Pitt, rubbing his glasses, "very vehement, indeed,

for a young man who has his way to make in the world."

"You do *not* deny it," I say, "and that is sufficient. If we don't prosecute and convict him as a felon, it is because we have no money—and no friends."

"So far as I can see," says Uncle Golightly, "Mr. Titmarsh has done his duty by you—and a very thankless duty it seems to have been—in the strictest sense of the word. It appears that when he came here, he found you on the brink of ruin (the style of living was always most extravagant), and so far from helping himself to your inheritance, he has spent the whole of his small fortune, five thousand pounds in all, I believe, in trying to retrieve your position."

"A mere trifle—do not mention it"—murmurs Mr. Titmarsh, whose expression is that of some resigned suffering saint only kept upright by the thought of the crown that will be his by-and-by.

"He has kept account of the paltry sums he put in," I say; "but is there any of those he took out?"

"I leave the Court poorer than I entered it," says Mr. Titmarsh, with great dignity, and addressing our relatives, "but I do not complain—neither would I leave it now were I of any farther use in it, but being unable to avert the ruin that has long been

gathering, and having no money left of my own, I have accepted a humble post abroad, and sail almost immediately. Some day, perhaps, these young people, now so hard on me, will judge me differently."

He appears to break down, and turns abruptly aside to the window.

"My dear Mr. Titmarsh!" says Aunt Theodosia, rising and rustling after him, whereat Pink May, as I live, becomes scarlet, fidgets, then ambles after him too, appearing at his other side. We see him cast an impartially tender look on each, as he takes from his pocket-book a piece of paper and hands it to Aunt Theodosia.

"As steerage passenger," we hear him murmur, as he puts it back again, and then our aunts come slowly back, with actually tears in the eyes of each.

"Bunkum," said John James, unexpectedly and aloud.

"Sir!" says Colonel Golightly, for the first time appearing to perceive the existence of the individual whom his sister stooped to wed, dying of the condescension before the year was out.

"*Bunkum*," repeats John James, bounding from his chair, and snapping his fingers thrice in Mr. Titmarsh's astonished countenance; "*that*'s for your mission and your steerage passage, and all the rest of it! You're sneaking out of England to enjoy the

money you've filched from these children, and pretty lucky you may think yourself that you ain't being sent at Her Majesty's expense. Ugh! it makes me feel sick!"

And he reseats himself, violently, looking as if a black draught were being held under his nose.

"Bravo!" cries Anak, with a great clap, that sends Mr. Titmarsh shuddering backwards. "Well done, *Uncle* John James," and he seizes him by the hand and shakes it heartily.

"Silk cloaks with cotton linings, my boy," says John James, indicating Lady Theodosia and Colonel Golightly elegantly with his thumb, "colour, *green*."

"Insufferable!" says Colonel Golightly, prancing up and down with rage, but the lady, with an excellent assumption of not even being aware that John James is present, consults her watch.

"It grows late," she says, "and we have actually as yet only settled the future of one of these poor creatures. Jill we may consider provided for, and Hetty I should think will be able to make up her time very well between the houses of her two sisters, especially if they are liberal to her in the way of cast-off clothes."

"And boots," murmurs John James.

"Uncle Golightly's influence will, no doubt, obtain posts for the two elder boys in a bank—the

younger ones can, by the exertion of influence in the right quarter, be got into schools—so *that's* all settled. When will you be ready to come to me?" she adds, peremptorily addressing Jill.

I feel a little tug at my hand, I grip hers fast, and look Aunt Theodosia full in the face.

"Never," I say.

Aunt Theodosia bounds on her seat.

"You mean to say that you refuse my offer?" she screams, "absolutely *refuse* it?"

"Speak for yourself, Jill," I say. "Will you go with her? To dust her china, make her velvet gowns, mend the house linen, differing in no degree from her other female lackeys, save that you receive no wage?"

"I will stay with you, Dick," she says, clinging to me, and looking up in my face.

"And starve," says Aunt Theodosia, venomously. "What! are all my plans to be upset by an insolent young malapert in a jacket?"

"It had tails once," murmurs John James, gently.

"If one might venture to enquire them," she cries, swelling with passion, "what are your plans?"

I disdain to reply to her, but Anak, with unwise courage, rushes precipitately to the front.

"We mean to stick together," he says, all the colour in his bright face, "to work, to struggle on—

if needs be, to *starve* together—but some day or other to win the right to come back to Sieviking and live in it again, as our fathers did before us."

"I think," says Aunt Theodosia, angrily, "that before making all your arrangements, it would be as well to consult the principals in the matter, and, as I said to Mr. Pitt just now, neither your Uncle Golightly nor myself see our way to spending a large sum of money in——"

"Keep your money, ma'am," says Anak, curtly, "we never asked for it, and don't want it. We mean *ourselves* to win the right to live again in Sieviking; we shouldn't value it a bit if we were beholden to charity for it."

"O! excellent! very good!" says Aunt Theodosia, holding her handkerchief before her mouth, and affecting to smile. "I don't think these young people *quite* understand their position, Mr. Pitt, or that unless Colonel Golightly or I purchase Sieviking, they have not the remotest chance of ever setting foot in it again save as strangers?"

"It is not true," I cry, trembling in every limb, "Sieviking, our own Sieviking to be *sold?* It can't be true—say it is not true," I cry, seizing Mr. Pitt's arm and shaking it violently. "Say that we are ruined, homeless, weighed down by debt, but do not say that Sieviking is lost to us!"

He answers me not a word, but I think there are tears in his eyes as he looks up at me, there are none in mine as I turn and face the miserable cur who skulks behind our aunt's petticoats, trying to stand erect, to smile.

"And this is your doing—yours," I say, through my teeth. "O! God, that such as you should have power to tear up, and cast out the family that has grown, and thriven, and rooted itself in the soil four hundred years and more! That to maintain your worthless body in luxury, our lives should not only be ruined, but that the sole hope that would have brightened them, should be wrested from us, leaving us no heart to work, no future to look to, the old home gone, the family broken up and scattered through the world." . . .

"Dick! Dick!" cries Jill, clinging to me in terror, "don't look like that, don't—perhaps someone in the family will buy it." . . .

I put her back, her face is dim to me, an awful sensation of loss, of hurt overwhelms me, I feel as though part of me had been cut away, leaving me for the moment possessed of but a maimed consciousness—the arrow of the enemy has verily found me out, and pierced me to the very core of my heart, Sieviking.

"Sir," I say, turning to Mr. Pitt, "when you told

me last night that we were ruined, why did you not tell me this also—why have you told me half, not the whole of the truth?"

"I knew what a terrible blow it would be to you," he says, "and I thought the shock would be greatly broken to you, if I were able to tell you this morning that it would remain in the family, and might possibly be rented or repurchased by you at some future date. But neither Lady Theodosia nor Colonel Golightly care to become purchasers—so the property will have to be put up to public auction."

"Is this absolutely necessary?"

"The creditors will not wait. The only wonder is that you have been allowed to remain here so long. Mr. Titmarsh (he permits himself the luxury of a tone of sarcasm) has certainly shown great adroitness in staving off the crash so long."

"Aunt," I say, marching up to Pink May, "*you* love us, or used to—we're not too proud to ask a favour of *you*—won't you buy the old place and keep it for us till we've earned enough to buy it back again of you?"

"I only wish I could, dear Dick!" says Pink May, the tears running down her cheeks, "but you see, I am so very poor; we have only just two hundred a year for us all to live upon, and if I get

rid of that, where will the poor girls be, and what is to become of us all?"

For a moment I look at her, not understanding; then in the midst of the hollow selfishness of the rest, the goodness of this simple soul touches me so to the heart, that I put my arms around her little frail body, and kiss her with a feeling of almost reverence.

"I'm dashed," says John James, jumping up, "if I wouldn't buy it myself, if I'd got the money—but I haven't, and that's the long and short of it."

Colonel Golightly and Lady Theodosia cast upon him a glance of superb contempt. To be vulgar with means is bad, but to be vulgar without, is to be a species of mental cherubim who with all the desire to sit down, lacks the wherewithal with which to accomplish that feat.

"But I thought you were going to marry *him?*" says Anak, suspiciously, as he gives her a hug that sets all her little gewgaws topsy-turvy.

"Dear Anak!" she says, trying to set her cap straight. "Mother to my own sister's children—who ever thought of such a thing?"

"I should hope not, at your time of life," says Aunt Theodosia with a violent sniff (surely a washerwoman must have been one of our direct ancestresses), "though a person who would be guilty of that cap,"

she adds in a lower key, "would be guilty of anything."

"It is a beautiful cap!" cries Anak fiercely, "and she looks beautiful in it; and if I have to sweep a crossing for it, ma'am, she shall *always* have a ribbon of just that colour to wear."

"This dear lady," says Mr. Titmarsh advancing, and as he advances, Anak retreats, "has shown so much sympathy with me under my troubles as to make me her firm friend, but we have no thoughts of marriage." (Pink May's face falls,—every woman would like the credit of refusing an offer of marriage when she has not the reality.) "I may have some hopes," (he gives a wonderful look at Aunt Theodosia, who turns a deeper plum-colour, and looks down, simultaneously pressing Pink May's hand, who simpers and looks at her brass shoe-buckle,) "but I will not speak of these now. Permit me to remark that, subject to such restrictions as Lady Theodosia sees fit to impose, I think the idea an excellent one that Miss Sieviking should reside with the young people in my absence."

And he retires to the background, having by one stroke convinced both women (one of whom he has never seen but twice in his life—but let that pass—*l'audace*, *l'audace*, *toujours l'audace* should

surely be man's motto with woman), that he is in love with each.

"And so no one will buy Sieviking," I say, looking out through the open window, the thought idly passing through my mind that there will be a splendid crop of apples this year, "I don't suppose it has any great beauty save its woods to recommend it to other people, but the soil is fertile, and there is good hunting in the neighbourhood."

"Why don't Lady Hungerford or Mrs. Longleat buy it?" says Aunt Theodosia, "they have plenty of money for their follies; let them do something useful with it, as you seem so set on retaining Sieviking."

"Our sisters, ma'am," I say, "received no fortunes; and it is right that such money as their husbands please to give them should be spent on the appanage that fits their position. To ask either to purchase Sieviking would be unjust."

I lift my head, and look from one to the other of the two shallow selfish faces before me, and there stirs in me something of that feeling so magnificently described by Plato as "a rising up of a part of the soul against the whole soul," and I feel that one word of appeal, of prayer to the two before me, would choke me in the uttering.

"Come away, Jill," I say, taking her hand in mine, and so we go silently away, with nothing in the wide world now that we may call our own, but one another.

CHAPTER XII.

"But this is human life . . .
The disappointment, the anxiety,
Imagination's struggles far and nigh,
All human."

In Sieviking woods the stir, the flutter, the frolic of spring is at its height. As the April breeze ruffles the tree tops, a pale shimmer of green seems to pass like a breath over their surface, delicate as hope, vivid as imagination, exquisite surely as the foretaste of that happiness which mortals dream of, but never grasp. As yet all is vague, indefinite, no more than a tender breadth of colour, but soon will be spread before us the work with which Dame Nature night and day has been busy aloft.

With her cunning fingers she is crimping, nicking, fluting, and crannying the young leaves at their birth, so that by-and-by, when their green flags wave royally in the breeze there shall be no two alike, or of precisely the same colour and size.

It is only when she comes to her least successful work, that she sinks into dull uniformity of design, and reproduces her worst impressions inde-

finitely. Everywhere is seething, nascent life, that each moment precipitates itself blindly a step further on the path of knowledge, and to the initiated ear the air is full of curious, subtle sounds as the young life of the forest struggles out of bondage and darkness into light. Someone has said that if our ears were able to catch the murmur of the currents whirling in the millions of cells that make up every tree, we should be stunned as with the roar of a great city. And if a man do not feel his heart (howsoever heavy) stir in him with the young buds, then he is not God's creature, fashioned out of dust, even as they, but something in which the soul, the very breath of life is wanting.

The very wind is brisk and full of business to-day, with no more than time to look into a blue eye here, or touch an opening lip of sweetness there, his business being to beat up the loiterers, to hurry the timid, so that when the roll-call of the flowers and leaves shall be called, not one shall be found missing. To break asunder the brown buds within which the pointlets of the oak-leaves lurk, to coax the crimped fans of the beech-leaves out of their fawn-coloured sheaths, to jog the memory of the silver fir, and to bid the poplar shake out her rustling skirts of silk, these are his tasks.

All of which preparations I note, to all of which

whispers I give heed, looking and markening stubbornly, as one who draws his death wound together with both hands, and cries aloud that he cannot be hurt, for that he feels no pain. To-morrow, and to-morrow I will suffer, but this April day is mine, and these woods are mine, and on the swelling uplands the broad meadows of our inheritance, I will look once more with the pride and love that have grown with my life, strengthened with my strength.

A shadow crosses the sun, and on my cheeks there fall the first drops of one of those petulant April showers, that borrow the sound and fury, while possessing none of the force, of a real storm.

The topmost boughs of the trees swaying beneath it, show their rufflings of green upon the dull brown surface, the starlings' nests sway in the upper trunk holes of the hollow giant beneath which I sit; for a moment, I almost fancy that I shall hear the rain sweeping up with a roar through the forest, in one of the great storms that now and again beat around Sieviking.

I lift my brow to the passionate stinging rain drops, and their touch seems good to me. For I know that there will come a time when I shall long for the feel of a spring shower, for the smell of the woods and fields, when in the narrow haunts and crowded ways of men I shall look back to these

days of poverty and freedom, and deem that in them I might have reckoned myself, happy.

How shall I hear the tread of the reasons go by in the dark, stifled city life? They who dwell there say in March, "there will be violets in the hedges, now," and in May, "the cowslips will be shaking their golden bells," but to us who know, Nature's moods are defined by no sharp and sudden line, she merges her seasons one into the other as she wills, and we reckon not by this month, or that, but when the sloe flower whitens the hedge say, "we must get our barley ready for sowing," as when the eel is known to be stealthily leaving his winter quarters the alder boughs will be bursting into blossom.

I wonder why it is to our first home, to no later one, no matter how happy we may be in it, that we cling with such passionate love and admiration? Is it that in our extreme youth we have intenser powers of loving, or that with the fierce faithfulness of all untried souls, we rebel against any notion of change as ingratitude?

No matter how hotly may burn in a youth the spirit of adventure, he seldom leaves his father's home without the hopes of returning to it. If he can do so without one pang, neither expecting nor desiring to see it again, if he cannot point out one spot and say "There I have dreamed; yonder I have

suffered and enjoyed," then he is without imagination, and the golden stores of memory are as sealed books to him.

I came hither this morning at daybreak, and sitting beneath this very tree, I watched the cold dawn spread in the grey skies.

There was scarcely a tint of rose in the heavens, the flowers were wan and pale, and poor Adonis (the anemone) seemed to wish himself warm below the earth with Proserpine, instead of above it with her rival.

All seemed cold and lifeless, but I was not cold, for hope was warm within my breast, and I felt as he who knows the work that is set to his right hand, and feels within him the will and the power to do it.

I saw stretching out before us the long years of toil, of self-denial, of sacrifice, and I said to myself that almost every great man that ever lived had looked ahead in his youth as I was doing, and resolved, as I was resolving, to conquer. That most great fortunes had been made by men who began as penniless lads like me, and I thought they must have done it by determining, no matter how humble might be their first avocation, by always doing a little more than their duty.

And, at the end of the long vista, Sieviking and

honour seemed to smile at me, and as my thoughts brightened, so did the morning; opal lights flushed the heavens, the flowers ceased to tremble, the shimmering green of the young year caught the sunlight; the morning had stretched herself, smiled, and was awake. I rose, at length, and made my way homewards. With a secret exultation at my heart, no longer the child, the passive disciple of Nature, but the youth whose eager eyes looked out hopefully on the battle of life, into which he was about to plunge.

That was at daybreak, this is but noon, yet in the interim I have leaped at one bound from youth to manhood, I have left for ever the illusions of youth behind me, and attained to the bitterness and infidelity of manhood. I no longer hope, I *will;* I do not dislike, I *hate;* I look human nature in the face, and, finding it vile, cast it underfoot, and cry aloud that it is not God's work; with the defiance of the rebel, not the courage of the hero, I buckle on my shield, and resolve to conquer, not for honour's sake, but that I may hurl back in the teeth of those who have scorned us, a contempt equal to their own.

I laugh aloud, and the echo of my laughter comes back to me through the forest, harsh and ugly. I am thinking how curious it is that we should ever

permit ourselves to be most deeply moved by those whom we most profoundly despise, that they should have power to bring out the worst traits in our nature, while those we love and value, at best do but doubtfully encourage the good that is in us.

Revenge, hatred, lust of gold for power's sake this morning found no place in my breast; honest ambition and the desire to regain Sieviking alone fired me, but now it seems to me that less than the joy of dwelling again in the old house would be the fierce joy of showing our contemptible relatives that we could win back our inheritance without them.

He has strayed far from the path of greatness who desires success but to humiliate those whom he despises. Stung by a sudden self-contempt, I lift my eyes to find that the storm has almost spent itself, that the skies are blue as the beaten down periwinkles, flowers of death, at my feet, while in the distance, bathed in tears and sunshine, Sieviking emerges radiant out of the mist of rain.

This is the last day of April. How many years will it be before I again see its dear familiar face smiling at me through an April veil of laughter, and of weeping? Ah, me! ah, me! when at length I shall have won back our inheritance, and stand beneath these trees with the weight of years upon my brow, will it then be to me all my heart's desire—will it

suffice to fill my life—shall I be content to set down beneath their shade and rest—happy?

"We *must* win it back—we *will*"—I exclaim, lifting my eyes defiantly; and as I speak, Lo! the great bow of God in the Heavens, beautiful, terrible, sublime, the one eternal oath that never has been broken; and as I gaze at it, abashed, the words dying as boastings upon my lips, I see how in its span of glory, that radiant arc seems to encircle, and hold in its shelter, the distant roof-tree of Sieviking.

CHAPTER XIII.

"God made him, therefore let him pass for a man. In truth I know it is a sin to be a mocker."

"DICK! Dick!" calls Jill's voice through the wood, and I rouse myself with a start to find that the sun has gone down, that a chill wind is wailing through the trees, and that I am wet, cold, and hungry.

"I have been looking for you everywhere," says Jill, as she sits down beside me, and looks anxiously into my face, "in the tallet, the pigsty, everywhere but here."

"It is cold," I say, standing up; "let's go in. It's about the last time you'll look for and find me *here*, old girl."

"But we shall not have to go *at once*," cries Jill; "we may be here months longer if nobody buys it."

"How could we enjoy it if we knew that at any moment a stranger would have a right to call it his own? No, no; I have said, Good-bye to Sieviking, Jill."

"Then, are we going soon, Dick?"

"Yes, we have idled long enough; now we are going to work. Have all those people gone?"

"All but John James; he is in the schoolroom. He is a good little fellow, Dick!"

"Yes. And what is Mr. Titmarsh about?"

"I fancy Marshall is packing, and that *he* means to go away in a day or two."

"Or sooner," I say, with a grim smile, that Jill does not see.

"Where's Pink May?"

"She saw him kiss Aunt Theodosia's hand at parting," says Jill, fencing off a night-jar that comes whirling against her in its phantom-like flight, "and she was very angry. I think she is upstairs putting on another cap."

The ruddy fire-light shines through the schoolroom window as we go by, and in the midst of the circle round it I espy the chubby features of John James.

"Here you are at last," cries Hetty, pulling me towards the fire; and as I sit down blinking like an owl she tries to warm my hands between her own, fussing over and fidgetting me as women (God bless them!) always will and do those they love.

"You must be starved," says Jill, taking the bread and cheese out of the oak settle, while

Anak retires to a distant cupboard to draw a jug of cider.

"I have some work to do to-night," I say, briefly, "I will eat after. What have you all been talking about?"

"You," says John James, smartly, "and it's all settled. You're to be what you want to be; you can begin to-morrow, if you like."

"Impossible," I say, colouring hotly, "there is no money for it; every penny that we can save must go to buy back Sieviking, for that we shall buy it back," I add, doggedly (the rainbow's hues being still around me), "I am certain."

"H'm," says John James, doubtfully.

"It's all settled," says Solomon, nodding his little wise head, "and you're going to have your fees paid at a hospital, and will see bodies—*dead* bodies—just as often as now you see live ones."

"While at home you will have at least four people upon whom you can practise as subjects," says the Squiffer.

"And when you are *getting on*," says Anak, "we shall be able to utilise our numbers by acting as your domestic servants; we should form a complete staff, and people would think you were making a fortune."

"Which is the next step to making one?" says

Hetty; "but, O! Dick, it would be an awful thing to go through life labelled—Sawbones."

"Don't be afraid," I say, dryly, "probably I shall never be anything higher than a chemist boy. What made you all talk such stuff?"

"It's earnest," says John James, solemnly. "Look here, Dick. I'm a poor man; but when your aunt stooped to marry me, and died, it wasn't poverty killed her, nor yet regret (as her fine relatives said, though she knew 'em well enough for the wind-bags they were), but the little young life that took hers, and then *that* went too, and I've been a lonely man ever since, and I like you, Dick. I can't buy Sieviking, nor yet offer you something handsome to live upon; but if you'll let me pay your expenses for the profession you fancy, till you feel your feet in it, why I'll be as proud to do it as if you were the boy that might have lived to grow up, but didn't. No thanks, now, for I feel it an honour to serve a good plucked 'un like you." I stretch my hand across to him in silence. Hitherto we have despised this man, for we are as proud as we are poor; at this moment I have contempt for myself only.

"Thank you," I say, simply, and then our hands fall asunder, but not our hearts. John James and I are friends henceforth to our lives' end.

"Yes," says Jill, "you are to become famous, and

rebuild the family home and honour, and the rest of us are to sit down under the shadow of your greatness, for ever. It will be a grand day when we come back home for good, won't it, Dick?" she adds, with an abrupt change of tone, her eyes wandering round the dear old room with all the love in them of a last leave-taking.

My eyes follow hers. There is the old round table at which we have sat and groaned at our lessons, and chaffed over our frugal meals; there, too, the corner that each of our noses had fitted in turn (why does such a peculiar ignominy attach itself to being stood in a corner? And why does every nose, of whatsoever shape, fit any corner accurately?) There, too, the old spinet, which one may sit upon without evolving a groan from its inner consciousness; and a hard ache comes into my eyes as I look, for I know that we shall never see them again as we see them now. When we come back to them grown men and women they will have grown strange to us, perhaps have become poor and paltry in our eyes, as do most things at maturity that have been precious and beautiful to us in youth. Bring me back the same face! cried the mother to her boy when he left her to learn the world. Juster to have cried, Bring me back the same heart! for the face may not soon alter, but the heart must. Happy he

who goes through life with the illusions of youth still on him, and is esteemed a fool of his fellows; he has touched truest wisdom, and lives and dies happy.

"We had grown used to it all," says Jill, sighing; "to the short commons, and shorter frocks; the bills, the Chancellor's extortions, and *his* hypocrisies; but we have rubbed along somehow, and in spite of everything we have been happy—happier than we shall ever be up in London."

"Perhaps Cynthia and Bell will be kind," says Hetty, looking into the heart of the fire; "we shall be asked to their great parties sometimes, you know, and——"

"You will go to them in the frock you have on," I say, ruthlessly, "and they will be proud of you, no doubt. No, our sisters' paths and ours will lie far apart; they are not at all likely to clash." Hetty answers nothing, but hers is the silence of rebellion, not assent.

"Uncle Golightly and Aunt Theodosia are our guardians," I say, addressing Uncle John James, "and as they have decided that Sieviking is to be sold, we can't prevent their doing it. That is now their business, ours is to find some quarters to which we can shift at the June quarter. But before settling anything we must know exactly what we have to

live on. I don't like taking Pink May's money—she will have to break up her little home, and send the cats and dogs adrift; and at her time of life she won't care about roughing it, as we shall have to do——"

"Not so *very* old, after all," says Pink May, herself (who has entered unobserved), bridling very much, "though your Aunt Theodosia did insinuate that I was past an offer of marriage; and the pets don't eat much, Dick; but it's only two hundred a year."

"We can just live on it," I say, thinking hard; "pre-supposing that we are all as idle as sloths, and as unlucky as poor people usually are, we can just manage to keep body and soul together on it. We won't talk of ever paying you back," I add, giving her a kiss, "for we never could—the kindness—but if ever we grow rich, you shall go to Court, aunt, in a train a mile long. I shall start for London soon, and see what is to be got."

"Sieviking is not sold yet," says Anak, grumblingly, "we're living here rent free at any rate; it's throwing money away to go to town as long as we can stay here."

"Every hour we remain," I say, restlessly, "is one hour of hard work lost,—sets us farther from regaining Sieviking. We must look forward, not

back; work, not lament; and the sooner we are out in the world, the better."

"That's sense," says John James, as he rises from his chair. "And, nephew, if I may call you so, I'll meet you at Waterloo Station at one o'clock midday, this day week, and go with you to an old friend of mine in the profession, who will put us in the way of all we want to know—and at the same time we'll just look round for a house to hold all these young people. And now, Good-bye everybody, and God bless you."

"I'll go out with you," I say, when his farewells are concluded; and signing to Jill to keep everyone in the schoolroom if possible, I follow him down the stone passage.

When we reach the hall he is turning off to the stables, but I put my hand on his arm, and as he turns, surprised.

"I'm going to pay Mr. Titmarsh a visit," I say, quietly. "Will you come with me?"

He looks at me for a moment, then grips my hand without a word, and follows.

How impossible it is to hear a footfall on these carpets. . . . . Boreas himself would be constrained to enter yonder door as gently as a zephyr.

It swings back as on velvet, and the sound of a mildly-complaining voice makes itself audible to our

ears. At first we imagine it to be raised in soliloquy, until a distant figure stooping over a half-filled trunk becomes visible.

"Do not pack the Cuyp, Marshall; it was given to me by my late wife, to whom it was presented by *her* previous husband, who received it from his first wife, widow to John Sieviking; but I will take nothing with me about which a question can be raised, and poorer far than I entered Sieviking, I am proud to say, I leave it."

"Yes, sir."

"The packing is nearly all done?"

"Everything but what I could finish in half-an-hour, sir," says Marshall, intent on his box.

"You will go with me as far as——"

"Ruing, sir," says the man.

"Rouen," corrects Mr. Titmarsh, "you will leave me there; and if the—ah—mission for converting the—ah—cannibals should be unsuccessful, and I return to this country, you will re-enter my service."

"Yes, sir."

"I ought to have some success among them," says Mr. Titmarsh, regarding meditatively the glass of *curaçoa* in his hand, "I have lived among savages for four years, now, and should know something of their little ways; but I don't fancy the climate will

agree with me, I shall become consumptive, I feel sure of it, and return to die—but recover."

A respectful giggle from Marshall announces his appreciation of the joke.

"I think you may as well give a hint in the village that I am leaving to-morrow, Marshall; they all feel for me here. I am going to a foreign land to work, perhaps die, for my step-children. You understand; and a little sympathy on my departure would be very grateful to me."

"I understand, sir," says Marshall, with another smile.

"No one shall ever say that I shirked my responsibilities—that I ran away," says Mr. Titmarsh, rising with dignity, a dignity that somewhat leaves him, as he comes face to face with—me.

"Nobody will ever say that you ran away," I say, walking close up to him, "for everyone will know that you were kicked out, like the swindler that you are. Now, then, I give you half-an-hour in which to get your traps together; if they are not ready by that time you will go without them. Do your work, Marshall."

"Turn out this boasting young fool," says Mr. Titmarsh, white with passion, and turning to the man.

Marshall advances, not daring to disobey, but

when he is within reach, and without stirring a foot, I give him one between the eyes that sends him backwards till he reaches the open box, into which he tumbles, nose and knees, in a heap.

"Half-an-hour," I say, consulting father's watch, "there's a train that leaves the nearest station in an hour and a half—you'll just catch it. I will harness White Bess and bring her round, so that Marshall may only have to pack."

I march across to the box in which he is still doubled up, pick him out of it, set him on his feet with a shake, and leave him.

"Just stay here, and see that thief doesn't pack up some of our things in mistake for his own," I say, addressing John James; "don't take your eye off him for a single minute, or even let him go up-stairs without you."

Leaving him to this agreeable task, I betake myself to the stable, and by the aid of a lanthorn, for by now it is quite dark, proceed to harness White Bess. As I lead her forth, a dolorous blast from the garden causes her to shy violently. The cornet-player is at his tricks again, and so much the better if he fixes the attention of the rest upon him. I want to get rid of Mr. Titmarsh by myself; there is something mean in the notion of our all setting on him together.

When the phaeton is ready, I lead Bess round to the front door, the door that is so rarely opened, but that to-day has opened and shut to more than one unwelcome guest.

I re-enter the house; the coast is clear, apparently every one is in the garden trying to catch the ghost. Mr. Titmarsh is the sole occupant of his room, of which the blinds are pulled down and the candles lit. He is sitting as negligently as usual in his accustomed place, but the charm of the room is gone with the disappearance of the thousand trifles that gave it character. Marshall is an expert packer; he will not leave much behind him.

"The half hour is nearly up," I say, quietly. "Evidently you have no hoards of money secreted in these rooms, or you would not be sitting so quietly there. Only a vulgar thief would do that—and you are an artist in your line."

I go to the foot of the staircase by the side of the conservatory, and call to Marshall. "Time's up. Bring down your master's trunks, or you go without them. Those too heavy to take can be sent after you."

There is a sound as of heavy weights being dragged to the head of the staircase. I return to the library.

"I'll be even with you for this, young Dick,"

says Mr. Titmarsh, with a curse, as I face him again —and he is.

There comes a day when even as he has dashed the light and happiness out of my life as a youth, so he hurls from my lips the cup of happiness lifted to them as a man, but this I do not know to-night, as I laugh aloud in bitter scorn of his threat.

"You!" I say, with an intensity of scorn that it is sin to feel for even the vilest of God's creatures; "you have taken our gold, but you can never touch *us*—take our dross and go your way; you were never but a bastard shoot falsely grafted on the good old Sieviking stock, and as such we tear you off, and breathe free, now that we are quit of the dishonour of your presence. Pah! the place will smell as sweet as a nosegay without you."

Marshall enters, dragging his master's paraphernalia after him. He has been wonderfully spry considering that he labours under the slight disadvantage of at present having only one eye at his disposal.

"There are six trunks upstairs, sir," he says, "all packed, but I can't get them down, and the phaeton wouldn't hold them."

"They can remain," I say, curtly; "there is only one thief here, the one who is leaving, and as you will have to bring White Bess back from the station,

you can remain here to-night and leave with them to-morrow. I fear, sir," I add politely, to Mr. Titmarsh, "that you will have to dispense with the services of a *valet* to-night. I hope nothing has been forgotten, your dressing-case, your travelling-bag, your flask of *curaçoa*, and your night-draught?"

He grinds his teeth as he buttons his gloves, gives one look round the room and turns on his heel, pursued by the ear-splitting entreaties of the cornet to "meet him once again, for love is waiting, shall it wait in vain?"

"The last time I shall hear *that* fool's damned row again," he mutters, with a curse, as I follow him out, but as we reach the foot of the stairs whom shall we see stealing down it, but poor silly, foolish little Pink May with something in her hand squeezed up very tight (somehow he has contrived to let her know what is going on), and she goes trembling and crying up to him, and presses this little something into his hand, but not before I have caught a tiny flash of steel. O! poor women, loving, trustful, foolish women, how good you are, how credulous . . . I don't know if there is a tear in his eye as he puts that poor little purse back, and stoops to kiss the hand that holds it, but surely there might be one. She clinging to him, they go towards the open door, where, all being ready and the moon shining

very clear and bright, he pauses a moment at the top of the flight of steps to say some last words to her.

Now this flight of steps is very high and very steep, so that the phaeton and the top step are about on a line, and this accident of a height is the immediate cause of an idea. Let it be distinctly understood that in relating that which follows I forfeit all and every claim to being considered a hero, that I may subsequently put forward in the course of my story.

Forgetful of that honourable maxim which decrees an attack on the rear of one's enemy to be as dishonourable as to turn the same portion of one's person to the foe in battle, I lift my toe with such precision, skill, and vigour as to seat Mr. Titmarsh violently in the exact centre of the front seat of the phaeton.

"And now," I say, addressing Marshall, "get up and drive that carrion away."

But Mr. Titmarsh himself gathers together the reins, his dignity unimpaired. He will want something more than dignity to cover him when he alights presently, if that dismal crack as of rent clothing which I heard just now, meant anything.

"I am not surprised that your last act to me should be one of violence," he says, "but I forgive

you. Good-bye, and God bless *you*," he adds to Pink May, and he drives away in the clear moonlight.

He carried it off very well, very well, indeed; nevertheless, when he is quite gone, John James and I sit down on the stone step and laugh till the tears run down our cheeks, as they are running down the streaked ones of the faithful little soul who stands within the door, crying bitterly, with the little steel purse clutched tightly in her hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

"She was na ten miles frae the town
When she began to weary;
She often looked back, and said,—
'Fareweel to Castlecary.'"

After Mr. Titmarsh's departure, euphoniously described by Anak as the "dirty kick out," events march quickly. We have been years nearing the brink of the precipice, but now that we are once over, we don't take long to find our level. Our desirable estate figures handsomely in every newspaper in England, and the advent of a fool and his money may be expected any day.

The first sharp pang is over. Obeying the game instinct that impels all young, healthy creatures under punishment to start up erect and defiant, denying that the knock-down blow just administered has hurt them, we have erred on the side of bravado, and avoiding all talk of the present, have launched ourselves and hopes vehemently on the wave of the future. We have walked to church with our heads higher than ever, and not flinched at the looks of pity, or reprobation cast upon us.

We have braced ourselves up, resolved to go bravely through with it to the end; and, after all, it is but the first step that costs, in this, as in everything. It is with the present, not the future, that we wrestle, wringing a meed of victory from it. . . . It is the first determined step planted in the direction of right—the first bold advance towards success—the first agony of bereavement as the first deadly sting of disgrace—these we have to provide against; what comes after, will provide for itself. Once the supreme struggle is over, half the battle is won.

At the end of a week, collecting our energies and rags in one final and heroic effort, we have summoned the Chancellor, and, by a grand *auto-da-fé*, scraped together sufficient money to pay my expenses to London.

There I am met by John James, who, arrived at the terminus but a few minutes before myself, carries me off there and then to the man who is to set my feet upon the track of knowledge.

"I'm afraid Gilly's gone down in the world," says John James, as we pass through streets that grow dingier at every turn. "The cleverest fellow that ever stepped. His ruin, Dick, is the Bottle."

In a room so grimy, so choked by dust as to

make a free breath impossible—a room so piled up with books in half-a-dozen languages as to make it almost impossible to pick a way between them, with a skeleton in one corner, a skull in another, while the table is a confused medley of food, human bones, and stunted bottles containing mis-shapen monsters, sits a tall, spare man, in whose eyes burn alternately the fires of genius, and the fever of drink.

"Gilly," says John James without circumlocution, "I've brought you a young fellow who means to be a surgeon, and I want you to put him in the way of becoming one."

"Humph!" says Gilly, turning his piercing eyes on me. "So you find plenty so dull, that you think you'll try starvation for a change?"

"Ay, if by starving I can earn bread for others."

"Then, make friends with a publican, lad, or apprentice yourself to a chemist—never become a surgeon."

"Some have succeeded," I say stoutly, "why shouldn't I? And I want"—I look round at the countless books hungrily—"to try and unravel the pnzzle of life, and this is the only profession in which one can do that."

"Can you?" he says, curiously. "I should say our highest discoveries were only gropings towards

light. Where are you staying?" he says abruptly to John James.

"Nowhere; we have but just arrived."

"Then come here; I've got an attic with a bed in it."

* * * *

On the morrow, plodding patiently from early morn till nightfall in searching for the modest dwelling that is to contain us, we chance upon one that in no way differs from hundreds of others, save inasmuch that before it is a narrow strip of garden, behind it a grass-plot with a cherry-tree in one corner. Dissembling my delight, I ask the rent, and find that so long as we are punctual in the sum of twenty-five pounds a year from Midsummer next, we shall be free to call it our own.

The bargain concluded, John James is ready to go home again, and it is with reluctance that he accedes to Gilly's rough, "Leave the lad a week or so with me—I'll look to him," for Gilly, either by example or precept, would scarcely be considered a suitable guide to youth.

But athirst as I am for knowledge, and panting to set my foot on the first bye-path leading to that goal, I remain, gladly drinking in from my Gamaliel such draughts of advice, experience, and worldly knowledge, as in a few days suffice to set me rub-

bing my eyes, and wondering if I am indeed the raw, ignorant lad who, but a week ago, would have guarded with his life the traditions that it is now conclusively pointed out to him, *are not*.

He shows me human nature, not as I believe and wish it to be, but as it is, and it is a nature that I hate; and passionately rebelling against this denial of all good in the image of God, I cry aloud against his teaching, and seek to close my soul against light, as do all men at first when light means to them the overthrowing of centuries of blind tradition.

I can but storm—I know not how to reason; a belief is disproved, an illusion blown aside by every syllable that falls from his lips—"For all that you destroy, all that you take from us, give us something better!" I cry, not knowing how when this fever of doubt has spent itself I shall come back to the spirit if not the letter of the old religion—how, as I study it in that Book into which no blunder or error can possibly creep—that which is traced by the finger of the Almighty upon earth, where each insignificant footstep on the ground covers a chapter in the world's history, where worship of the thing, rises to worship of the Maker, it will bring me nearer to my God than I have ever been before. The giant forces that move in cloud and river, and

field and sea, form the "mighty sum of things for ever speaking" with a voice that cannot lie . . . . it is only the human one that does dishonour to its Maker. I have cried aloud for knowledge—I have got it,—experience, too, that Coleridge compares to the stern-lights of a ship casting light only on the track that has been traversed—and which should avail me something, were the experience given, not bought, ever known to make a man proof against mistakes. I came to Gilly a boy, I leave him a man with (theoretically) a knowledge of life that many an aged one might envy. For this man has lived in every sense of the word—his wisdom is ripe, he has seen life in its every phase, it is as an open book to him, and bitter indeed is the reading he expounds to me out of it.

Plato calls words "the shadows of thoughts," but as I hearken to this man's speech, I am more inclined to cry with Mirabeau,—"Words are things." Alas! that after a magnificent peroration that sweeps me away on the tide of its eloquence, I should half an hour later see the vigorous hand relax, the fire of those eagle eyes that looking upward have found light, grow wandering, the splendid light of the intellect quenched in the fumes of intoxication!

Perhaps the great trouble at which John James

dimly hinted was the root of this man's degradation, or the weakness of will so constantly associated with great strength of brain was alone responsible.

On the last night of my stay with him, his ruling vice goes fair to despatching himself and me by a warm road to the other world.

I went to bed, leaving him prone like Samson among his books, but unable to sleep, I rose again, and descended in search of a book. Gilly had retired to the adjoining apartment, but though both rooms were in darkness, the candle was conspicuous by its absence, until a smell of burning wood gradually assailed my nose.

I looked around, holding aloft a match, but there was no light anywhere—at last I went to Gilly's bedside, and there found the clue to the mystery. In his arms he grasped the Dutch cheese that just now furnished our supper—with this he had lit himself to bed, firmly believing it to be the candle, while the latter, a-light of course, he had carefully locked up in the cupboard. Fortunately the key was there, the burning wood had not yet leapt into a blaze, and a little cold water soon settled the business.

CHAPTER XV.

"Thought rules the world."

ARMED with a trunk full of chosen books lent me by Gilly, and such valuable hints or instructions with regard to my course of study as should save me many a weary mile on the road to knowledge, I return to Sieviking with good hopes that by working my hardest I shall be able to pass the preliminary examination in June. I seem to have been months away from the old place, but all is the same. I alone am changed; and as the days go by, and I become more and more absorbed in study, less and less interested in the trifles that formerly made the sum of our home life, I begin to think the twins must be right when they one day hazard the guess that Dick's soul got "changed" in London, and it is only his outside that has come safe home again.

In an attic that looks to the west, I heap my books around me, and sit down among them with the first throes of that hunger upon me that no man, though he live thousands of years, can ever satisfy.

"Books," says Dryden, "are spectacles to read Nature." The saying long puzzled me, but now I begin to understand it. We feel, but do not know Nature, till we have garnered the fruits of ages of other men's research—of men who, cutting their way through darkness and danger towards light, scarce dared to discover, or discovering, to utter aloud their knowledge, yet which from the first dawning of the inspired thought, to the chain of proof forged link by link, lies perfecting in our hands to-day.

It is a long time since Giordano Bruno was roasted alive for preaching the plurality of worlds; since one of the wise men of Greece, guessing the moon to be as large as the Peloponnesus, was laughed at for his boldness; since human beings, ignorant of or denying a Supreme Being, at the same time entertained a belief that beasts were as responsible for their actions, as amenable to reason, as themselves, so that on June 4th, 1094, a pig was solemnly hanged at Laon for devouring an infant; and in 1506 the Courts of Troyes admonished the caterpillars, by which that district was overrun, to take themselves off within six days, on pain of being declared "cursed and excommunicated!"

Grim with humour, if red with blood, is the

page of superstition, ignorance, and oppression; faint and few are the rays of light that struggle across it, mere indications of those later beams that should make it clear as day with the full rays of truth.

If since the world began, as fierce a war had been waged against ignorance, as against knowledge, to what heights of culture should we not by now have attained? But the ignorant as the many, warring against the wise as the one, by mere brute strength, have been able, if not wholly to crush, to so clog and hamper the unit, as to make its path one of infinite labour and pain. Ignorance is Content; in its dull, sluggish, know-nothingness it meets on equal ground the knowledge that at its highest trembles, and cries, "I have amassed—I have gathered nothing"—and hates to be jogged from its repose by light. Light. . . . . That would be God itself had He not said "Let there *be* Light!"

"Draw not near the light, for it is accursed," is the preaching of those who would deprive man (or, as in Sanscrit, the latter signifies, *thinker* and also *soul*) of the exercise of God's noblest gift, who dub him infidel that reasons as a man, instead of believing as a child; who refuse to hear one argument, regard one proof, that, while perfectly reverent to

God, as truth must ever be, is contrary to the traditions that are wrongly supposed to form the true basis of our religion.

In God, all religions begin and end, and surely he worships Him most intelligently who realises His strength and splendour best, not from the words passed from lip to lip of man, and so handed down to us inevitably corrupted, but in His works, that with no adding to, or taking from, come to us fresh and perfect from His hand.

The Greek religion, in which the beautiful was the divine; the Egyptians, who worship Nature; the Romans, who bow to law as the highest good; the Northern races, who deify courage (strength); do not they one and all rest themselves upon the All-Father?

The old Aryan faith was almost a pure Nature religion—a worship of the powers that were seen in progress around. Slowly there grew a sense, that moving the many powers was the one, greater than all, and so the belief was founded that "there is but one God."

All things bow down to Him, all hearts, however, they may have strayed, go back to the Heaven-Father, the Supreme Good . . . it is the first and last instinct of life to utter His name . . . "God bless you!" murmurs the child to its mother, with its first

stammering speech, "God keep you," cries the husband, when the darkness of death is hiding from him the face of his best-beloved.

Strangely beautiful are some of the Aryan myths, pure and good exceedingly some of the teaching of their great prophets who have risen, and swayed mankind, reckoning well-nigh by millions the units who bow to Christianity. The insolent Darius was proud to style himself an Arya of the Aryans, from them we draw most of the fairy tales that have delighted us, the stories that we have thrilled over in our childhood, and it is with something of a shock that I discover the dear old romances to be literal transcripts of the life that moves about us, and the stories of real life to owe their birth to imagination.

I am compelled to abandon the heroes of youth too—including as more or less outgrowths of myth, the tales of King Arthur and his Round Table Knights, the Iliad and Odyssey, and the stories, dear to all hearts, of the skill of Tell the Archer, and of Gellert, the hound who was slain by the father of the child he had just saved.

Though the crossbow said to have been used by Tell is still to be seen at Zurich, it is certain that he never existed! The legend has passed into the language of almost every people, and by wild tribes

who have never read a book, or heard of Tell in their lives, it is related chapter and verse of one of their own marksmen. The explanation is, that the story is an old Aryan sun-myth. Tell is the sun-god whose light rays never miss their mark, and also kill their foes. The story of Gellert, too, over which we have all wept, and whose grave railed round at Beddgellert, may be seen this day, occurs in all sorts of forms, and in the folk-lore of nearly every Aryan people, and is also found in China and Egypt; and when one hears of a wonderful story happening in all places, one may be excused for doubting if it happened anywhere.

Cinderella, too, is no oppressed younger sister; we find her in the Veda as a dawn-maiden. The young prince (the sun) pursuing her as the aurora, finds no footsteps, but a tiny slipper, and always seeking her, he cannot overtake the chariot in which she rides. So here is another sun-myth as the source of an old nursery tale.

"Beauty and the Beast" is to be found in Hindoo, Greek, and Norse myths, and the tale of the "Giant who had no Heart in his Body," is almost an echo of the Hindoo tale of Punchkin. Many of *Æsop's* fables, too, are borrowed from those of Buddha, and that of the fox who will not go to the lion's den because he sees only the im-

press of feet going *in*, is found word for word in a Hottentot tale. Then, Little Red Riding Hood, who, in the German story, is cut out of the sleeping wolf by a hunter; Tom Thumb swallowed by a cow but coming out unhurt; Jonah swallowed by a fish that casts him ashore unharmed; all these are legends telling of the night devouring the sun; while in a poem at the end of Passover services used by the Jews, we find the source of the stories of the "House that Jack built," and of the old woman who couldn't get her pig over the style, that concludes in this fashion:

"Then came the Holy One, blessed be He!
And killed the Angel of Death,
That killed the butcher,
That slew the ox," &c., &c.

Even the mighty combat of St. George and the Dragon waxes dim, when we find it is but another version of the battle between Apollo and Pythôn, or of the Norse legend of the struggle 'twixt Sigurd and the dragon Fafnir, while the Satan (signifying sin) of a later religion was borrowed from the same source.

Beginning humbly as serpent, poor Satan, who from man's inborn dread of things that at once creep and fly, has been developed by successive stages into the very embodiment of evil, we may be

pardoned for doubting his existence, save as a prisoner upon earth, that very literally crawls on its belly, or exists only in our hearts, out of which proceeds all evil.

Simple, beautiful, and grim by turns are the guesses made by man at a former state before he yet possessed the rudest means of writing those guesses down, and it is out of this wonder that the legends have grown, which in every nation and language may be traced to the same parent source.

All tell of a happy state of existence, in which neither labour (distinctly we inherit idleness from our first parents, or to trace it still further back, from the first or dawn-animal, the Eozoön) nor care entered, till evil stole in, and beguiled men with a lie.

To quote from the original:

"The Pârsê looks back to the happy rule of King Yima when men and cattle were immortal; when water and trees never dried up, and food was plentiful; when there was no cold or heat, nor envy, nor old age. The Buddhist looks back to the age of glorious soaring beings who had no sin, no sex, no want of good till the unhappy hour when, tasting a delicious scum that formed upon the surface of the earth, they fell into evil and in time became degraded. It was King Chetiya who told the first

lie, and the people who heard of it, not knowing what a lie was, asked if it were white, or black, or blue. Men's lives grew shorter and shorter and it was King Maha Sâgâra who, after a brief reign of two hundred and fifty-two thousand years, made the dismal discovery of the first grey hair."

Strange that so deeply-rooted in human nature should be the love of ease, when, to nearly all, death, that long, long night of repose should suggest images of terror only. . . . the Norsemen only speak tenderly of death as *Heimgang*, a term moving and pathetic, as spoken by these wild rovers of the nameless seas.

Passing by the frightful Babylonian legends with the gentler Hindu and Persian ones of our origin, we come to a somewhat amusing one of how men once lived underground, but finding one day a hole in the roof, they crept through it, and were tempted by the abundant food to remain above ground. Later, we learn with something like a throb of aversion, as though we were suddenly called on to love something hitherto profoundly antagonistic to us, that the Hindu and Icelander, the Russian and Italian, the Englishman and Frenchman are children born of forefathers who once lived in one common home.

Bah! This is not work, it is romance reading.

Let me brace myself up by the study of dry, hard facts, nor, until I have earned the right, lose myself in that ecstacy of wonder that is the most insidious foe to application.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Shall I tell you what knowledge is? When you know a thing, to hold that you know it, and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it: this is knowledge."

THE scented snow of the hawthorn has melted from the boughs, the May buds have stolen out in dress of rose, and white, and pink.

Sieviking, in all the royal flush and wealth of accomplished spring, lies basking and beautiful in the sun. First, the south wall has grown blue with wistaria, sweetest smelling and most elegant of creepers; then the lilacs have waved aloft their million scented plumes of white and lavender, and the laburnum, with pensive mien, has shaken to the breeze her ringlets of paley gold. Then the May trees have come, treading on each other's footsteps, sisters but in shape and scent, their hues varying from palest pink to deepest flame colour, and down yonder, in their cool dark beds, lurk lilies of the valley, thick as leaves.

I find Jill one day with her head buried in a great cluster of lilacs; she has never had time, or seemed to care much for these things before, but I know that she cares now.

I think it is Jean Jacques Rousseau who says that "the sense of smell is the sense of memory," and Lover who has called memory the "sight of the heart," but of this I am sure that to my life's end, I shall never smell a lilac bough without the bitterness of this leave-taking coming freshly back to me.

The air seems the purer for Mr. Titmarsh's departure. He did not go far on the journey along the first steps of which I propelled him with such vigour a month ago. White Bess broke down (by the merest accident) exactly opposite the lodge gates of Aunt Theodosia's country seat, ten miles distant from here, and he was assisted into the house by Marshall, being unable, thanks to the brutal usage he had just received, to walk without aid. He sat in a cloak the rest of the evening (Aunt Theodosia said in a furious letter to me) nobly desirous of hiding his injuries (and, he might have added, his rents).

He is there still, and every day we expect to receive wedding-cards. Pink May has gone to arrange about leaving her house, looking like a little ruffled, dejected cockatoo. She is very angry with me, and will never forgive me that kick as long as I live. Simultaneously with one nuisance has departed another. The cornet's voice is hushed, and the mystery of the player was solved in this

wise. After seeing off John James with more politeness than the guest just departed, and perceiving a light in Anak's room, I looked in, and to my surprise there was his stalwart form stretched on the bed—so *that* was the reason I had conducted the little business below stairs without interruption. Advancing, however, and eager to impart my pleasing intelligence, I seized him by his abundant locks, when to my horror, his head seemed to come off in my hand!

As I recoiled, still grasping it, the door opened to admit another Anak, who, with mouth almost as widely open as the brass instrument he bore, appeared as frightened at the sight of me as I was but now by the accident that happened to *him*.

"So it's you, is it?" I cried, dropping the wig, "who have been giving us such a treat for the last month?"

"Yes, it was me," says Anak, complacently, as he puts away his cornet, "and I think it was very neat myself—a few more evenings will about drive him out of his mind, or out of the place—it don't much matter which."

"He's gone," I say; and so the tale is told with much mirth, and many bitter regrets from Anak that his toe should not have been at hand to give the *coup de grâce*, or even one good extra kick "for luck."

A few days after, turning out an old cupboard in Anak's room, that hitherto he had kept jealously locked, Jill came upon the following mysterious document:—

"To teaching young gentlemen to play cornet by ear in a course of six lessons, twelve shillings.

"To loan of best superfine cornet, extra compass, seven nights, three-and-sixpence.

"*Paid*—Fifteen-and-six. Bill Hodge, His mark."

So at last we know why Anak never bought the new boots.

Mr. Pitt was here yesterday, and with him came a gentleman rather bigger than the Squiffer, but not so large as Solomon. He did not say that the shooting round about was vile, the hunting the worst in England, the wooded country unhealthy, he seemed taken with it all, and my heart contracted with a bitter pang as some instinct told me that in yonder little man I beheld the stranger who was to rule over our inheritance. Impatient as I have been to depart, I now grudge every hour as it passes. But the days go by, the last but one of May is here, and still there is no news; on the very last of all there comes a letter. And it tells how our inheritance has passed away from us (may be for ever) to the hands of the stranger.

CHAPTER XVII.

"A homeward fever parches up my tongue—
O let me cool it 'mong the zephyr boughs!
A homeward fever parches up my tongue—
O let me slake it at the running springs!"

THE King is dead—long live the King! It is a very little king who comes stepping towards us across the lawn from which the morning dew is not yet brushed; he smells of civet, or something equally abominable; wears gloves and moustachios, and a hat that he might have stolen from Mr. Titmarsh.

We cannot welcome him, the words would choke us; we salute him in silence, but he does not seem to mind, or even notice our omission, for he is staring with all his might at Hetty.

As they pair off together, I see his little eyes glancing hither and thither, keen and quick, "improvements" in them, surely; and I tremble for the fate of our old copper beech, and many other familiar trees, more venerable and well-loved than beautiful.

As we follow, Anak, stooping down till his nose nearly touches Mr. Menzies' shirt-collar, announces in a Boreas-like whisper that he "wears a wig."

"He's wonderfully like old Titmarsh," he continues in the same tone; "looks even frailer—he can't live so very long you know, and then we can buy back Sieviking."

"Be quiet," I say, warningly, "he'll hear you," and, indeed, at that moment Hetty throws back a sudden apprehensive glance.

"Or, better still," continues Anak, growing excited, "let her *marry* him—then we shouldn't have to buy it back at all, for naturally he'd *leave* it to her (he'd pop off directly after they were spliced)—and she'd marry again, of course, and give it to *us*. Why it's the very opportunity I was wishing the other day she might be lucky enough to get, and here it is before you can say Jack Robinson! If she lets such a chance slip, I know what *I* shall think of her—but she couldn't be so disgustingly selfish, surely——"

"Anak," says Hetty, suddenly facing round, "if there's one thing I hate more than another it's having my heels tripped up—either walk beside, or *before* us, if you please."

He selects the latter alternative, and still possessed by his brilliant idea, stalks ahead, and is lost to sight.

Jill pulls out her stocking and walks beside me,

the twins vanish to some mysterious haunt, we are able to pursue our prowl in peace and quiet.

It is the first of June, the first of the thirty days of revel allotted to the Queen of flowers, and, being royal, she is punctual, not keeping us waiting as the lesser flowers often do, and this morning we awoke to find a garden of roses. All night long the fairies have been at work, trimming these myriad lamps of cream and gold, and crimson, and as the first trembling shaft of sunlight touches them, Lo! they are alight, their fragrance rising as incense in the morning air. Where yesterday we saw but buds, to-day are waving a thousand blooms, the old mullioned windows are a very "light of laughing flowers," and over the stone entrance, the cloth of gold roses, climbing, squander their wealth as royally for the stranger as all the years of our lives they have done for us.

This warm breath from the garden has paled and withered the humble woodland flowers that ran before the Queen, and bade the earth make ready for her coming, and even the May is dying, that of the paler hue first, the ruddy scarlet last, and slowly, as if it were loth to obey the season's bidding.

The roses always bring the sun—or is it the fiercer heat of the sun that brings the roses? We are glad to sit down beneath the beech-tree who

lifts his head of glory high above his fellows, and upon whose giant bole is traced the green and gold chequered pattern made by the shining of the sun through the leaves.

A pale brindled beauty-moth flutters delicately by. We sit so quiet that a bright-eyed rabbit comes within a yard of us, and washes her face. Our presence hushes not one of the multitudinous voices of the forest, but presently human ones make themselves audible, and in a few moments Hetty and her companion emerge into view. But what is this? He takes her hand, she does not withdraw it; he ventures to salute it, she receives the homage with magnificent nonchalance; she looks a young Cophetua in her beauty as she moves through the wood beside him. How do girls learn to flirt? Do they imbibe it with their mothers' milk? It is a pity the twins had not been females, for it's pretty clear that there will never be any difficulty about providing for the girls in *our* family.

"I will marry him if you like," says Hetty, an hour later, standing up straight and tall in the sunshine, rueful laughter in her blue eyes, her cheeks flushed to the hue of the rose petals she is pulling asunder. "I am sure I could if I chose—he all but asked me in the wood, and then you

could all live on here—the only question is, whether I mightn't do *better?*"

"Better?" says Anak, scornfully, "O! the sinful, disgusting ingratitude of girls! Here's a chance that I'd give one of my eyes for—d'you think if a widow had bought Sieviking and fancied me, *I'd* disappoint her? I'd marry forty—and here you are talking of doing *better!*"

"He's too young," says Solomon, shaking his wise head; "he can't be more than sixty, and he might easily live twenty years more. If he were eighty, it would be another matter."

"I'd back myself to polish him off in less than six months," says Anak, confidently, who has walked behind too many funerals to have any sickly sentimentality about them, "and as I said to you the other day, Hetty, then you can put on a widow's cap, and if you *should* fancy any straight-nosed Apollo for a second husband, why you will be well able to afford him. Let's see—he's coming here to-morrow to decide whether he'll take the old oak furniture and the pictures—you can let him know that you've made up your mind to take *him.*"

"What does Dick say?" says Hetty, turning her yellow head (all the Sievikings have the yellow in their hair, if they have none in their pockets) towards the remote corner where I am writing.

"What do you want?" I say, throwing down my pen, "my opinion?"

"He hasn't heard a word," says Hetty, mortified, "and I was screwing myself up to the point more for him than anybody else—he'd be lost, if he had not got his beloved woods to go mooning about."

"Yes he has," I say, briskly, "you are to marry the new owner, Anak has settled all that. Has he also fixed the day for the wedding?"

"It's a very good idea, say what you like," says Anak, colouring violently; "just improve on it, if you can."

"I thought we were agreed that we would not live on charity," I say, quietly, "and yet here you are, proposing a life-long dependence on an utter stranger. Would Sieviking be any the more ours because we lived on the soil? Would it be a thing to be proud of, to be loitering our lives out here, waiting for dead men's shoes? No, Sieviking shall be ours entirely, or not at all. You need not get your wedding frock ready just yet, Hetty; you are not going to marry Mr. Menzies."

"And I say it's a tempting of Providence to refuse such a chance," grumbles Anak, "although to be sure (his face brightens) you might get him to adopt you, Hetty!"

"I hope he'll do Aunt Theodosia out of the

Esterhazy brown," says Jill, who has just come in; "it's all uncovered, boys; would you like to come up and look at it?"

We go upstairs to the long, wide, many windowed room where in father's and mother's and the Trevelyan's time, we used to sit of Sundays, clean and orderly, rather afraid of the gold legs of the chairs, but saved from dulness by the study of the pictures on the walls. We enter in on tip-toe, and catching sight of our shabby figures in the mirrors feel out of place, and possessed by an impulse to run away.

"Whew!" says Anak, looking round, "what would the Chancellor say if she only got in here? Why, the proceeds of one of these cabinets would clothe us sumptuously for a whole year; and as to one of these glasses"—he pauses, and looking at himself over his shoulder, remarks, "Well, I never knew I was such a guy as *that* before!"

"There will be more than enough here to pay Higgins," says Jill, "I wonder, now, if Mr. Pitt would let *me* have the money for the tradespeople, and pay it away?"

Jill's one notion of happiness here on earth is "paying away," and her one idea of heaven is, I am certain, an endless vista of tradesmen arriving, each with a bill a mile long, which she promptly

satisfies out of a bottomless purse; this to go on to the end of time. It is the ambition of most people to keep a little something in their pockets, not so, Jill; money to her would be useless could she not instantly "pay it away."

With the morrow comes Mr. Menzies, and for the next three weeks there's chaffering, bustle; the modest bits of furniture that we are to be permitted to take with us are set on one side—verily a broken-winded, bow-legged, one-eyed lot they be, matching our crooked fortunes admirably. Mr. Menzies follows Hetty about from garret to cellar, pressing all sorts of elegant trifles upon her; a piano, a picture, a piece of Sévres; last of all, and in desperation—himself.

"Say 'Yes,'" whispers Anak, from behind the palm, where, in sagacious anticipation of this climax, he has hidden himself; but Hetty, remembering the truths told her by the pierglass recently, says "No" with as much *aplomb* as though she were used to saying it every day of her life.

Does a shadow for a moment blot out the sunlight, as I gaze abroad on Sieviking, and know that one of us might yet have owned its broad lands, and bade us welcome to them from time to time?

I thrust the thought from me, and go about my work with dogged perseverance. There is much to

be done and thought of; but at last all is finished, our goods having set out yesterday, and the day of our departure has arrived.

Last night a wild west wind arose, and, this morning, Lo! the roses were all gone; it is as though a mighty breath from heaven had blown out those lights of gold, and cream, and red, and, struggling through clouds, the sun sheds but a tearful ray upon the old house, as, at the great gates, we lean forward to take our last farewell of it.

A stifled sob—I know not whose, or did each bursting heart contribute to the cry?—and the carriage moves on. Ignorant and penniless we are launched upon the wide, wide world!

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

"A' that Peggie left behind
Was a cot-house and a wee kail yardie;
Now I think she is better by far
Than if she had wed a lowland laddie."

TIME, July; hour, five o'clock; scene, the Park. The season on its last legs, and the world and his wife picking up their skirts and scurrying away like mad, desperately afraid of being left last at the rout. Where a week ago horses moved at a foot-pace, they now have room to toss their heads, to step up to their noses, to play their pretty tricks, all in pure sport, as we think; in agony, as the poor beasts who can feel but not speak, know well enough.

It is well that they are dumb, for if the cry of all cruelly-used brute creation could make itself heard, the puny voice of man would pretty quickly be silenced.

A flower-belt of dazzling colour closes in the

drive; how different to the wild luxuriance of Sievi-king! When it shall have reached its maximum of formal splendour, the fine people for whose benefit it was planted will be gone, we nobodies alone being left to appreciate it.

I wonder if a pair of judges of beauty were planted on either side of Apsley Gate, how many women they would turn back—how many would be permitted to pass through?

Apparently, beauty does not pay as a profession, for the handsomest women have the worst-appointed chariots, or none at all, while downright ugliness rolls prosperous and easy on its way.

But, whether pretty or plain, I like not the looks of the wives and maids who, lolling on their cushions, pass me by this afternoon.

In these latter days women are permitted too free an agency, and duty to parents or husband, respect to age, with a hundred restraints and traditions recognised by our grandmothers, are swept clean away. Husband and wife, parent and child, meet on equal terms, and the word "obey" is unknown, save in middle-class households, where virtue still flourishes, and the ten commandments are moderately observed. Perhaps the wretched training of women nowadays has something to do with their deterioration. How can a girl have a healthy mind

in a healthy body when she lives the life of one of yon poor triflers? Richest food and drink, softest observance of the body, the mind ever idle, unbraced, unstrung—absolutely without self-knowledge, her emotions her only law—how can she be expected to arrive at excellence?

Goethe says, "He who studies his body too much becomes diseased," and if the lives of the women of the upper classes is not a feeding upon themselves, then what is it?

Take them out of themselves, make them *forget* themselves, pull up the rose-coloured blinds, clear out the lounging chairs, burn the trashy novels, and at the risk of making hoydens of them, set them to emulate their brothers; give them a brisk, fresh, outdoor existence, and when you have done all this, the pads, high heels, and paint-boxes will vanish of their own accord, and we shall have a race of healthy, happy creatures, fitted to adorn the name of wife and mother instead of disgracing it.

This London does not please me, it is hollow and cruel; the wealth and the misery cheek by jowl, the one law for the rich, another for the poor, repel me.

Yesterday I saw a poor starving wretch steal a loaf of bread, and as they roughly dragged him away to gaol, he cried that it was for a sick wife

who lay starving at home, with a new-born babe at her dry breast.

Away with him for a hungry thieving hound! Let his wife and child, now that he can no longer work or steal for them, die in their garret!

Make way there for the great man's carriage, and stand aside, and be covered by the dust that flies from his wheels, for is he not rich and powerful? Does he not build churches, endow hospitals, and entertain the highest in the land?

He has ruined thousands by his speculations; he has thrown off more bubble companies than you can count; he has once or twice narrowly escaped the brand of felon, but the strong arm of the law cannot quite reach him, and he is free to come and go, to hatch his plots, to work his ends. Yet, betwixt that poor starving wretch and this man, think you will God judge as these earthly judges have done?

Again, cleanliness is next to godliness, says the proverb. Is it? Look at yonder great lady, sweet smelling, fresh as a violet, counting one speck of dirt on her white skin as contamination. You can't look inside her mind, but what is her character, the outcome of that mind?

Just as devoid of one speck of cleanliness as her body is of one speck of dirt, and I protest that

the poor drudge toiling along the street beside her grimy mate, who loves and is faithful to him, possessing a sturdy virtue of her own, is ten thousand times sweeter and cleaner in my eyes than the other.

And you, madam, who betray your husband as you list, but at whom society winks, because he still permits you the shelter of his roof, you are rarely described by any harsher term than *galante*, or *tant soit peu coquette*, while for the poor betrayed creature who sins once, and bitterly repents ever after, there is but one word, and that an ugly one.

Extremes meet, the highest and lowest classes touch, and are welded together in their immorality; only the one sins gracefully in purple and fine linen, the other in rags, and in a hovel.

In the month that I have been in town I have kept my eyes and ears open. I have listened, noted, thought, enquired, and the result has been to make me sceptical of the efficacy of virtue, honest endeavour, courage—of all and everything, in short, but audacity, successful vice, and humbug.

"*Dick!*" exclaims a fresh voice with some alarm in it; and, glancing up, I see Hetty and Jill looking as if they had just stepped out of Noah's Ark.

"What are you doing here?" I say sharply. "I told you on no account to come near the place.

At any moment you may run up against Bell or Cynthia——"

"And mayn't you?" says Hetty pertly. "I s'pose they'd know their own brother when they saw him, wouldn't they?"

"We have been in Kensington Gardens all the afternoon," says Jill, "and Hetty persuaded me to come on here; she wanted to see what it was like."

"Just for one turn," says Hetty coaxingly. "I knew we couldn't run up against Bell or Cynthia, for they're gone. I borrowed a Court Guide at a bookstall, and saw their names among the departures."

But the Court Guide was wrong. At the very moment Hetty speaks, there comes slowly past us an open barouche, drawn by magnificent greys, with yellow rosebuds at their heads, and behind them sits a beautiful young woman, dressed in white, whose bored blue eyes waken into astonished life as they fall upon—us.

For a moment we stand speechless, then, "Run," I say to the girls, and they do—for their lives.

I follow more slowly, first giving Bell (unseen by her flunkies) a nod, intended to re-assure her, and am just meditating on the fallibility of the particular paper quoted by Hetty, when I hear the

sound of footsteps pattering very fast after mine, and turning, behold my eldest sister, all out of breath and blown with running, her beautiful gown held up in both hands, her cheeks the colour of August poppies.

"Dick!"

"Bell!"

The girls come running back, there are ejaculations, kisses, and, I think, a tear or two; then Bell falls to looking at me reproachfully (but with one eye open to see if anyone is observing us), and dexterously directing our steps to a less frequented part of the Park, asks why we have not been to see her, or even sent our address.

"We are in fine trim for visiting, are we not?" I say, drily, "and your flunkies would lead you an awful life if they knew you had relations who lived in Picotee-lane."

"And where is that?" says Bell.

"Nowhere that you ever heard of—out Uxbridge-road way. You needn't hold your parasol over your face, Bell, there's no one to see you; and even if you did meet anyone you knew, they'd never suspect you of being our sister."

"You are a very rude boy," says Bell, colouring and tossing her little crocus head; "the girls have spoilt you, I see."

"In my class," I say, with mock dignity, "man is reckoned superior to woman, in yours he is a mere appendage to, and echo of her—leave to me my independence, madam, and I will not fail to pay you the respect due to your rank."

"This is unfair," cries Bell, in a rage. "I have *not* shown myself ashamed of you—I have tried again and again to find out where you were from Mr. Menzies, but he would not give me your address; he said he was forbidden."

"So he was," I say. "There—there, you can't help being a fine lady, Bell, but never fear that we'll disgrace you. Come to see us, if you please, but don't ask us to go and see you."

"Which is the very thing I was just going to do," says Bell, "but before we begin to talk let us get into the shade"—and there is not much further talk till we find ourselves seated beneath one of those giant trees that would be grand, were its roots not usually infested by some noxious insects that thrive peculiarly well in those parts, and are invariably found in pairs—lovers.

I think we have forgotten how handsome Bell is; or we are so unused to see the beauty that "goes beautifully" as to hail it with surprise; but certainly since I came to town I seem to have seen no creature so pretty as our Bell.

"This reminds me of Sieviking," she says, meditatively, as she leans, regardless of green smudges, against a tree. "I should have liked to see the dear old place again; but I don't suppose I ever shall now. How was it that old cat, Aunt Theodosia, or that little cock-sparrow, Uncle Golightly, didn't buy it?"

Their talk drifts by me. I do not hear them. . . . I am back again in my lost home. In my ears is the sound, as in my nostrils is the scent of the wind as it plays hide and seek among the gorse-covered slopes. I hear the chatter of the brook as it runs through the big meadow with its border of mock myrtle and agrimony. I search for, and find, the round-leaved sundew on the boggy bit of ground beyond, and follow the trail of the silver weed, with its flowers soft as velvet, while the blue eye of the flax, widely open, is at her post, watching over the slumbers of my favourite Jack-go-to-bed at noon.

In the garden the balsams rear their prim and stately columns, and the arched doorway leading to the espalier walk is one purple blaze of gorgeous passion flowers.

"If Peter and I were not so poor—so *dreadfully* poor," Bell is saying, "we would have bought it for you; of course, we never thought of such a thing as

its going out of the family. You were so quiet over it all; everything was so hurried."

"We had no notion of coming down on our brothers-in-law," I say, shortly; "they provide for two of the family as it is, and I should think they have all their work cut out for them to do that," I add, with a nod towards her dress.

Bell blushes a little as she glances down at it.

"One must be clothed," she says, "but girls, where, *where* in Heaven's name, did you pick up the extraordinary garments you have on? Antiquated I know we always were at Sieviking; I shudder to think of the gown, considered by poor Mrs. Trevelyan a miracle of taste, in which I stood up to be married to Peter; but *never* did I walk abroad clad in such a thing as *that!*"

"It was too short," says Hetty, apologetically, "so Pink May gave me a flounce off one of her skirts to eke it out."

"What! is Pink May with you?" cries Bell.

"If she were not," I say, "we should be in the workhouse or the streets. She houses, feeds, and clothes us, for as yet not one of us, strong and able-bodied as we are, have been able to earn a penny that we can call our own."

I am not able to keep the bitterness out of my voice. Would to God mine were that virtue so

pleasantly made by Hippias to consist of the entire freedom of man from all and every sort of dependence upon his fellow men!

"I knew that you had become poor," says Bell, in a shocked voice. "We are poor—everybody is poor; but I never for a minute imagined it to be anything like *this*."

She falls to thinking for a minute, twisting between her fingers a sprig of that herb, coral-rooted, shamrock-leaved, beloved of the good Fra Angelico, the wood sorrel.

Finally she pulls out a gossamer handkerchief, whence comes a whiff entrancing as if from the very "Boat of Foolish Smells" itself, and wiping an honest tear or two from her eyes, puts it away again with decision.

"Hetty," she says, solemnly, "if you like to come and live with me, you may. I will dress and find you in pocket money, and though, of course, Woolmer won't like it, as she is used to having all my old dresses, still if she is disagreeable I can get rid of her."

"Don't let Hetty deprive your maid of her perquisites," I say, quickly, "Hetty may go to you on an occasional visit if we can make her decent enough, but as long as we have a crust of bread —aunt's bread—at home, she shall share it."

I take Hetty's hand, but she only blushes, and half pouting, looks away.

"Go then, you pretty trifler," I say, "but do not expect to have lot nor part in our hopes, our ambitions, and our hard won joys. Take her, Bell, and don't make her feel her dependence more than you can help."

"No, no," cries Hetty, cut by my words—poor Hetty, whose selfishness is neither conscious nor acquired, but constitutional and not to be eradicated—"I do not want to leave you all; but I should like to go to Bell sometimes."

"And what is to be done," says Bell, gravely, "if some man (and I have half-a-dozen of the best *partis* in England coming to Hungerford in September) falls in love with Hetty? When she leaves my house is he to seek her in Picotee Lane?"

"If he doesn't love her well enough to come even there after her," I say, stoutly, "he won't be worth her having at any price. If any one proposes to Hetty, I shall insist on his knowing our circumstances; there shall be no pretences of any sort or description, and only on these conditions will I allow her to stay with either you or Cynthia." Bell groans.

"Don't blame *me* if she marries a curate," she

says, resignedly. "Well, we leave town the day after to-morrow, and after Goodwood and Cowes, we go to Hungerford, and the sooner Hetty comes the better. Perhaps Jill will come later?"

"We can't spare her," I say, patting her hand; "the house would be all to pieces without Jill; Hetty is the ornamental part of the concern; she always has a cold and takes to her bed when there is anything to be done."

"Jill is certainly *not* in the least like the other girls," says Bell, meditatively.

"We run in sets," says Jill, who has reheeled a sock since we sat down; "half-a-dozen of us are good looking, the other four are plain."

"I think Dick is the handsomest of the lot," says Bell, surveying me critically, "but his hair wants cutting. I wonder why directly a man gets seedy and out at elbows he invariably lets his hair grow? I think you might do very well in society, if you held your tongue (of course you can't talk,—very young men never can). Who is it says that to married women and single men are given the keys of society? You ought to marry extremely well, and I daresay you will."

"Heiresses are as plentiful as blackberries in Picotee Lane," I say; "but I don't think of settling down just yet, thanks."

"And, indeed, you boys seem as smart at keeping out of matrimony as the girls at getting into it," she says. "Where are Kit and Will now? I tremble to think of what their wives would be—should they bring any home!"

"They earn the bread they eat," I say, briefly, "which is more than the rest of the boys can say."

"And the twins?"

"Growing and—hungry."

"I don't know what father and mother were about to have such a long family," says Bell, shaking her head, "twins, too—so extravagant. For my part I consider three children *ample*."

"That is what every young married woman says until she has got a dozen about her," I say, slyly. "How is Cynthia?"

"O! very well, but—don't say anything for the world—but she is growing *fat*. Now you know I am plump, but I am *taller*, and it makes all the difference. I dine there to-night, and will tell her I have seen you. Let me see, supposing now——" she reflects a moment. "Yes, we could manage it, I think. Of course she would like to see you. I will bring her down to Picotee Lane to-morrow morning. We will beg, steal, or borrow a brougham; and we can settle all about Hetty's clothes, and the rest of it."

"Pray manage so that the flunkies shall not hear of it again," I say; "I tremble for you if they find it out."

"My character is gone already," she says, resignedly. "I left the carriage in the drive; they will think I came here to keep some appointment. Heavens! it is half-past six!" and indeed while we talked the shadows have lengthened, the insects have crept out, and every tree, save the one beneath which we sit, has its vulgar Jack and Joan beneath it.

"Whatever you do," says Bell, as we part with her at the gates; "don't *hint* to Cynthia that she is at all too stout; she hasn't the least idea of it, poor thing, and it would make her *miserable* to be told of it!"

CHAPTER II.

"A holy parcel of the fairest dames
That ever turned their—backs—to mortal view."

PICOTEE LANE has every head out of window, and all, forsooth, because a modest one-horsed brougham with two young women inside it, has stopped at the door of No. 7. And when that door flies open, and two girls come flying down the steps to meet the other pair, and all four mingle, and kiss one another, I vow they make a posy of beauty not to be matched in the whole town. They conclude their embraces within doors, and I have observed that when women, who really like each other, take to hugging, they do it with a heartiness and vigour that leave their favours to men very far behind.

They all retire to the parlour above me, where I hear their voices discoursing at a rate that makes me think pityingly of their unfortunate jaws.

By-and-by these two fine ladies, going over our tiny dwelling with a real curiosity, discover and unearth me, exclaiming at the number and size of the volumes by which I sit surrounded.

They turn them over with the tips of their white

fingers, to which diamonds hang like clusters of dew, and sit down involuntarily on nothing in particular when they hear for what profession I am studying.

"A doctor!" says Cynthia, and here I may remark she is one of those people who look the finest poetry, but live and speak most decided prose; "what could possess you to go in for the worst paid, as it is the least thought of, profession?"

"It is a grand profession," I cry, indignantly; "what other can compare with it? Which is the more noble—the barrister who pleads the cause of a scoundrel and lies this way or that according to his instructions; the parson who expounds matters he knows nothing about, preaches one gospel and lives another; the soldier who is paid to kill his fellow-men; or the man who gives his whole energies to prolonging life, and alleviating human suffering?"

"Bid our gentle Ariel bring bottled beer," says Anak; "methinks after that burst of eloquence our Æsculapius must be dry."

"I don't know but what he may succeed, after all," says Bell, surveying me thoughtfully, "if he learns the art of flirtation in a thoroughly good school, and acquires a distinguished manner. His looks are in his favour, and doctors, now-a-days, are sometimes quite decent people—the habit of regarding them as mere apothecaries is going out of fashion."

"I hope you will not refuse me your patronage," I say, drily; "being such a great person, I shall be happy to attend you, or your cook, for nothing."

"Bell, where are you?" calls Hetty in the distance; and a dress rehearsal being announced upstairs, I am presently left in peace, but not before Cynthia, turning at the door (she is last) has remarked, in a tone of deep feeling, "Such a pity dear Bell is getting so stout!"

My studies once broken in upon, I find it hard work to settle to them again, and go upstairs to the parlour, and, once inside it, make up my mind that if three women make one market, four women make *two*.

Anak, too, is contributing his quota to the general hurly-burly, as I enter.

"Look at me!"—he is saying, in a tone of disgust, as he slowly revolves before his sisters and Pink May, who, in her best cap and gown, sits mistress of the ceremonies; "John James's coat, Mr. Titmarsh's breeches, Dick's oldest waistcoat, Jill's collar—there isn't a bit of me that I can honestly call my own!"

"I wonder if I could get at some of Ughtred's old clothes without his man finding it out?" says Cynthia, with her head meditatively on one side.

"Perhaps I could manage that; but how to get them out of the house?"

"Couldn't you let them down with a rope from an upper window, after dark?" I inquire, sarcastically.

"No," she replies, quite seriously, "because I am either receiving, or from home; besides, we leave town to-morrow."

"Keep your old clothes, Cynthia," I say; "we don't want them. But it seems to me that it is you who are the servants; the servants who are your masters."

"That is true," says Bell, sighing. "If only we could view them in the same light as the French countess did, who when discovered by an intimate friend having her stays laced by the footman, and remonstrated with on the impropriety, exclaimed, "What! you call that *thing* a man?"

"I have a great mind to take a place as footman," says Anak, looking over his shoulder at his calves. "I should get a whole suit of clothes, at any rate, and plently to eat. What do you say, Bell, to my accompanying Hetty to Hungerford as manservant? If any fellow got flirting with Hetty, and didn't propose, I should be there to bring him to book, you know, and I might come in useful."

"You might," says Bell, laughing, "if the family

likeness were not so strong; no one could possibly mistake you for anyone but my brother."

"It is a pity Providence has not arranged things better," I say, gravely; "the prosperous ones should all have been of one pattern, the poor ones of another, so that the latter shouldn't disgrace the former."

"You are a perfect Diogenes," cries Bell, "or do you think severity is becoming to your style of good looks? When I left home, you were a pretty, good-humoured little boy, and now——"

"Adversity is neither handsome nor pleasant," I say, shortly. "Try it for a month, and see how you like it."

"Supposing we try something to eat, instead?" says Jill, taking a coarse, but snowy cloth, out of the settle, and laying it naturally, as one to whom the task is a familiar one.

"It reminds me of the old schoolroom days," says Cynthia, "when we had feasts, and whoever begged or stole the most good things sat at the top of the table, and did the honours."

"It is the same table," says Jill, pausing in her labours, "and" (with a sigh) "I think our appetites are even worse now than they were then."

"But they were very good," cries Cynthia the literal; "I often look back with envy to the time

when I could wash a carrot at the pump, eat it raw, and enjoy it."

"When I say worse, I mean *bigger*," says Jill; "the poorer we are, the hungrier we get, and though we have all the most *filling* things we can think of, we are always more or less hungry."

"And it is a sad thing to be looked upon as a greedy if you have two helps of pudding, or a second helping of butter," says Anak feelingly.

"There's rump steak for dinner!" cry the twins, rushing in, school satchels on back, but stopping short aghast at the sight of our two fine ladies.

"Now what are you going to drink?" says Anak, cutting ruthlessly in; "we have a magnificent cellar —round the corner, so make your choice, ladies, and I'll go and fetch it."

"They can't doctor Bass's ale," says Cynthia. So Bass's ale it is, Anak departing with a two-shilling piece and a fine air of independence, to fetch it.

He is back by the time our Ariel appears bearing the steak, and we draw in our chairs and sit down to table, as hearty and healthy a company as you could wish to see.

"The best steak I've eaten for years," says Bell, holding up her plate for a second helping, while Anak replenishes her glass, at which Cynthia gives

a disapproving shake of the head, that is meant to convey, "Fattening—very," while Bell a minute later goes through the same pantomime on Cynthia's account.

"If only the flunkies could see you," says Anak, with infinite zest, "taking your mustard out of a teacup, and helping yourself to salt with a bone spoon!"

"*And* Sir Peter!" says the Squiffer, taking advantage of Jill's head being turned away to abstract a piece of cheese, while Solomon pounces on a hunk of bread and devours it.

"I can't recollect him a bit," says Anak, applying his eye ruefully to an empty bottle, "but I fancy he was a sort of refined female in breeches."

A faint knocking at the door, hitherto disregarded, here becomes more decided.

"Come in!" cries Jill, supposing it to be Ariel; and there enters the very person whom Anak has just so happily (or unhappily) described—Sir Peter Hungerford.

"I found the front door open, so I walked in," he says, advancing, perfectly dressed, cool, well-bred, but distinctly and unmistakeably *cross*. "Ah! Cynthia, is that you?"

"I told you to come for me at four, and it is scarcely three," says Bell, colouring a little with

surprise, but still with that perfectly easy air of treating her husband as a mere adjunct to her state, that is altogether beyond the reach of any decent, duteous, middle-class wife.

"Pray be seated, Sir Peter," says Pink May, all of a flutter; and, every chair being occupied, there is a general uprising in his honour, which ends in his being accommodated with the best seat; while Anak, quite unabashed by the certainty that he has been overheard appraising his brother-in-law's charms, asks that gentleman what he will take.

"Port or sherry?" he says, waving his hand towards a distant cupboard, as though it contained both.

Fortunately Sir Peter does not, like the man in "Ten Thousand a Year," answer, "Thanks, I prefer both;" he declines all Anak's offers, who grows more and more magnificent as he finds there is not the slightest chance of their being accepted.

I wonder why one never feels the shortcomings, the *gaucheries* of one's relations so keenly as before strangers? Our eyes become slavish, and take the cast of theirs; we hear with their ears, angrily and rebelliously, it is true, but still *with* them.

Beholding all with Sir Peter's eyes, our homely room becomes sordid; the disordered table, with its empty dishes, disgusting; and we, ourselves, instead

of displaying honest and commendable fortitude in our poverty, seem to have reached that "point of satisfaction in the low and vulgar surroundings that by accident have become ours, when contentment becomes depravity."

Bell, too, suddenly begins to see with his eyes, and, with that instant ranging of herself on the side of her husband, at the expense of her family, that is apt to puzzle any one who has not made a study of the selfishness of human nature, she wonders to herself how she could have found rump steak, eaten with steel fork, delicious; and bottled beer, out of a cracked tumbler, a drink for the gods.

Her fine lady airs creep out and sun themselves; Cynthia follows suit, and we are transported to a world of polite society that we have not hitherto entered.

I don't think Anak's shot at Sir Peter was a happy one. There is a sense in his glances not to be belied by the langour of his air, and, without seeming to observe us, I am aware that not one absurdity, or roughness of our appearance and manners, escapes him, though it is only after I have been intently studying him for some little time that I discover him to be just as intently studying me.

I wonder is it Bell's doing or his own that he is here?

A remark from him on the threshold inclines me to think the latter.

Our married sisters have kissed us affectionately, but with reserve, and gone mincing down the steps, not half so hearty and handsome a pair as came running up them three hours ago.

"If I can be of any service to you, Sieviking, command me," says Sir Peter, giving my hand the grip of a man, not a *petit maître*.

"Thank you, sir," I say, returning it, "my profession is chosen; if I don't succeed in it by my own efforts, I shall then be grateful for your patronage."

"Take care pride is not your ruin," he says, carelessly, and so goes, leaving one bright face only among those clustered about the door—Hetty's.

When they are really gone, she undoubles her pretty fist and shows me what is tightly squeezed up inside it.

"There!" she cries, triumphantly, "Jill and I are going off to Whiteley's the first thing to-morrow morning to spend it!"

A trip to Whiteley's, with money in her pocket, is to Hetty as exquisite an enjoyment as "paying away" is to Jill.

CHAPTER III.

"How far this little candle throws its beams,
So shines a good deed in a naughty world."

A LETTER!" cries the Squiffer, bursting in, on the morning of Hetty's departure; "and what do you think? It's addressed to *father*."

We gather round it in silence—yes, it is addressed to John Sieviking, Esq., and has been sent on here from our old home; the postmark is Canadian. It lies on the table before us, no one offering to break the seal, till Jill says, in a low voice:

"Dick, you must open it." And I do.

"What is it?" they cry, as I read on and on, my face lengthening at every word, till by the time I have done, it is almost as long as Pink May's train.

"Would you have thought we could cut it any finer, aunt," I say, addressing her, "either in our clothes or our food?"

"Impossible, dear boy; if it weren't so hot you'd catch your deaths of cold, you wear so little."

"We shall have to wear *less*," I say, dryly, "or take it in turns to remain in bed, for in a few days

there will be another body to clothe, and a fresh mouth to feed."

"*Good* Lord!" says Anak. "Then I pity the new mouth and body—that's all."

"What *do* you mean?" cries Jill, picking up the letter; "it can't be one of the boys—they went away *after* poor father died. H'm, h'm—I remember the name (she looks at the signature); he was father's greatest friend at college."

"He is dead," I say briefly; "he was dying when he wrote that letter—a postscript in another hand says so—and he bequeaths his little daughter to his old friend John Sieviking, praying of him to support her out of his plenty till she is able to earn her own bread."

"Our plenty!" The letter reads like a grim jest. "A second postscript says that she sails by the same ship as brings the letter," says Jill, turning over the page, "and that the captain will see her to her journey's end. Why, Dick! she must be at Sieviking at the present moment."

"I say, she'll be cutting Hetty out with old Menzies," remarks Anak. "Does it say how old she is?"

"Fourteen."

"And her name?"

"Charolais."

"Do you expect me to do *all* my packing myself?" cries Hetty, putting an indignant head in at the door; whereupon Jill, who is indeed the hard working little beast of a bee from which Hetty, as the Aphides of the species, is wont by blandishment to wheedle its store of honey, vanishes, with the question of the stranger but half discussed.

"We can't send her back again," says Anak, "it would cost too much. She shall have half of my grub, and I'll give up beer; and she can wear Hetty's old gown's—I daresay she'll manage somehow."

"She will have to be educated," I say, walking up and down; "we shall be bound in honour to do more for her than for ourselves. It's just another spiteful trick served us by that jade, Fortune."

"Poor little soul!" says Pink May, "she must be lonely and miserable enough in a strange country. I wonder where she is?"

We are not long left to wonder.

On the morrow a letter comes from Mr. Menzies himself, announcing the arrival at Sieviking of a little young lady, and a big old sea captain. The latter departed again immediately, satisfied with Mr. Menzies' promise that he would deliver the young lady safely to the heirs of the body of John Sieviking.

For the present the housekeeper has taken charge of her, and Sieviking is quite at her disposal, so

long as she is inclined to remain, *après*—will somebody fetch her, or shall he send her properly escorted to town?

"She must be fetched," decides Jill, "unwelcome though she be, we can't use her so inhospitably as to let her come alone; but who is to go?"

"I suppose I must," I say, in answer to her anxious glance; and within an hour, for time with me is precious, I am on my road to Sieviking.

I feel as a ghost must who revisits his former haunts, as I alight at the familiar station, and take my way by the short cut, through the woods, to my old home.

Where shall I find this Charolais, in the house with the garrulous old duenna, or counting the apricots on the south wall, or looking through the bars of the old school-room window at the formal courtyard, beyond?

I wander on and on, as in a dream . . . . these cool silent glades, these drowsy solitudes, are they indeed but two hours in time from London, as they are the width of a world, in fact, from *me?*

I steel my heart against the beauty around me, it is no longer mine—for I am not of those who value things only in proportion to their distance from me—and when at length I pause at my favourite seat, the old copper beech, it is more from

force of habit than because I expect to take joy in the prospect therefrom.

But I find it occupied already. Some one dressed all in black, with two comical little green sleeves tied on at shoulder and wrist, with ribbons of the same colour, sits in the lap of the mighty old monarch—fast asleep.

Her head is to the bole of the tree, so that the sunlight laces her hair with its golden bodkin, and touching the dark eyelashes, turns to all manner of beautiful colours—a tear!

It must have gathered in her sleep—as I look, it trembles and falls but no other follows, she only sighs heavily, and the hand that holds the wild flowers on her knee relaxes a little. So this is Charolais. I sit down beside her, fold my arms, and wait till it shall please her to wake up.

This seat must possess a natural attraction for unhappy people. How else should she have chanced on it? Far out of the ordinary track it lies, and Jill alone knew it to be my favourite haunt.

I wish that she would awaken. This wood that is not mine, yet bates not one of her charms because she is not mine, has no power to delight me now.

What a sad little face it is; yet one more formed for laughter than for tears, surely. How dark the soft rings of hair, how deep the shadow of the dark

lashes on the pale young cheek—what slender hands and feet! Why, Hetty at fifteen would have made two of her.

"Poor papa!" she says, in her sleep; "O! poor, *poor* papa!" And that sharp throe of pain, pushing her hard, though only in dreamland, she wakens suddenly, and seeing me, starts to her feet.

"I—I have been asleep, I think," she says, looking bewildered, and rubbing her brown eyes, "and perhaps you can tell me the way back to Sieviking?"

"I will show you," I say, restoring to her the flowers that have fallen from her lap.

"You know the way?" she says.

"Yes."

She is taller than I had thought. As we go down the glade together, I see that her head reaches midway between my shoulder and elbow.

"It was very stupid of me to come so far, but it was my only chance, for perhaps I shall go away again to-day," she says, sighing.

"You would like to remain?"

"Yes; papa talked to me about it so often, that I seemed to know the place by heart. "O!" she cries passionately, and stopping short, "what would he say if he knew it was *gone*, that his old friend was *dead*, and that he had sent me over here to be a burden to the children?"

"No, no," I cry, "not that;" for she is trembling from head to foot, and in her brown eyes is a shame that scorches up the tears.

"When papa was dying, I begged, I prayed of him not to send me here. I said I could earn my own bread, and they might not want me; but he made me promise, and I could not choose but come."

We are walking on again now. As I pass each familiar landmark, I seem to be moving in a dream from which I shall presently awaken.

"I don't know why I am telling you all this," she says, timidly; "but you have a kind face and—and somehow——"

"You have done no harm," I say, gravely. "Lady Green Sleeves, how long will it take you to pack up?"

"O! my sleeves," she says, laughing and looking down; "the old housekeeper said I should get my arms freckled if I went out with them uncovered, so she rummaged out these sleeves—they must have been her great great-grandmother's, must they not?"

"Yes—don't bring them to town with you by mistake, they would make as great a sensation as Anak's knickerbockers."

"Anak!" she stops short, and clasps her hands.

"Why you must be a Sieviking," she cries, joyfully; then her face falls, she colours up with shame.

"But I forgot—you can't be glad to see *me*," she says, in a low voice.

"I am glad," I say, taking her two little hands, and kissing her on both cheeks. "To our poor home, such as it is, you are as heartily and truly welcome as if we had been able to welcome you to *this*."

* * * *

"Jill," I say, later in the day, "I have brought you a new sister—My Lady Green Sleeves."

They look at one another for a moment, then Jill's arms close round the slight figure, and henceforth the child's lot is cast in with ours, and the thread of her life, now dull, now bright, is woven in with ours to the very end; but not for many long years do I know the answer to the question I ask myself as I fall asleep to-night, "Is it as a blessing or as a curse that thou comest a stranger to our home, Green Sleeves?" She falls naturally enough into our home life; the little brown head fits easily into its place at table among the yellow ones. She is oftener sad than merry, yet we laugh oftener, if more gently, than before she came, and are somehow happier.

Anak's uncouth ways, with that broadness of speech which now and then degenerates into sheer vulgarity, insensibly undergo a change; he passes

three whole days without trouncing anybody, and, indeed, becomes so desirous of shining in the polite arts of society, that one evening he solemnly attempts to learn dancing.

"If a fellow can jump, he can dance," he says confidently; and not until he has nearly pounded the ceiling in, and made everybody ill of laughing, is he prevailed on to desist.

But a few days after Charolais comes—and it is the first stroke of good luck we have had since we came to town—he gets employment in a house of business in the City at the magnificent salary of fifteen shillings per week. Nothing could well be finer than the way in which, at the end of the first week, he hands over to Pink May a ten-shilling piece, as his contribution towards housekeeping, or the magnificent air with which he bestows sixpence a piece on the twins, or the pride with which he informs Green Sleeves that he is going to give her a grand treat the following Sunday—an afternoon in the country.

He walks three miles to his work in the morning, leaving here at six, traversing the same distance at night, usually returning home so dead beat as to be even incapable of eating, his only hunger being sleep.

Often after my long night vigils, on reaching the attic we share between us, I pause to look down on

the boyish face, and a pang seizes my heart to see how pale it grows. But not from me shall fall one word of discouragement; every fierce, well-sustained effort brings us one step nearer to Sieviking; and, with that bitterness of spirit which bids fair to be the ruling *motif* of my life, I find it in my heart to envy the lad his few poor shillings, honestly earned by the sweat of his brow.

For all my daylight toil, my midnight work, what have I to show? Sometimes when the lust of gold, for Sieviking's sake, is on me, and the *feu sacré* burns dim in my soul, I ask myself, "Is not my choice a mistake, and should I not be doing better to adopt some calling, however humble, in which I could be earning my bread, instead of living dependent on others, as for years I must do?"

But one hour at my books soon disperses such thoughts, or, rather, they spur me on to fresh exertions; and, by perseverance, who is a handmaid (while genius is a master, and very uncertain in his charioteering), I have good hopes of attaining the present object of my desires.

One should not look too far ahead; one should see what is exactly under one's nose, and pursue it till caught. Give me the scholarship, for which I am now working night and day, and I shall not be long in looking a-field for something else.

CHAPTER IV.

"It fell about the Lammas time,
When flowers were fresh and green,
Lizzie Bailie to Gartartan went
To see her sister Jean."

It is nearly two months since Hetty started off, in all the flush of her high hopes, and youth and beauty, for Hungerford. Tales of her doings filter to us from Jill, and from these accounts it would appear that she is having a very good time of it generally.

We, too, have had our modest share of good luck, for I have won my scholarship, and something of that feeling of independence, after which I have lately longed so bitterly, is mine. Anak, too, has got a rise of five shillings a week, so that in his opinion Sieviking is half won.

In these last days of September, that to me are an oasis of rest between the cessation of one toil and the commencement of another, our little home seems to me a very happy one. We have ease of heart, freedom from debt, moderate reward for honest endeavour, love for and trust in one another; and

when of evenings the curtains are drawn, and the lamp is lit, one could not wish to see a happier, healthier circle of faces than that which clusters round the old school-room table. Our dear Pink May knits, Jill mends and sews, Green Sleeves gallantly attacks a piece of woolwork destined to cover the sofa with glory when finished (if ever), Anak makes nets, and the Squiffer and Solomon take it in turns to read aloud to the workers.

But oftener still I take the volume in my hands as I sit in father's old chair by the fireside, and, with a zest that only recent hard work could give, plunge into that world of fiction which has hitherto been a sealed book to me.

The "Pickwick Papers," "Vanity Fair," "Jane Eyre," "Lorna Doone," the "Mill on the Floss"—these are the books that, told off on the fingers of one hand, will to my life's end constitute to me the whole library of fiction. There is one other book that fascinated me to an extraordinary degree, yet that I should never place in the same rank as the other five—"Paul Ferroll."

This I have read alone—and, obeying I know not what impulse, have locked it safely away where no eye will light on it but mine.

Shall we ever know the story, the real story of Charlotte Brontë's life? It has exercised many

minds, and yet it seems to me to be there, in the book; and somewhere Rochester lives, or has lived, no creature of imagination, but a man of thew and sinew, whose portrait has been dashed down in deathless colours by the hand of the woman who loved him. The story was wrung out of her by anguish, among the bleak moorlands, and in the meagre vicarage at Haworth the suffering within her rose to an intense wail that it never could have done had she lived the ordinary life of other women, the life that so surely crushes out genius, and reduces joy and suffering alike to a dead level that never is, or utters, aught but commonplace. Had her love been a happy one, we should never have had "Jane Eyre"—no satisfied, happy woman could have told her story in such words as these . . . as no woman could have imagined it, for the language of happiness can never touch that of agony. Nervous, intense, the cry leaps straight from the tortured heart, instinct with that terrible craving which is the be-all and end-all of baffled love, for whence comes all suffering on earth but through love in one shape or another; either through having lost its object or being unable to attain it? One must have suffered, one must have lived . . . above all, one must be human, and have sounded the whole gamut of earthly passion, nay, one must suffer

still, before one is able to stretch out one's hands to touch the heart of the people. More splendid deeds, more deathless songs have been crushed out by happiness than is ever known or guessed . . . happy folks, especially women, rarely come before the world's eye, or express themselves in noble speech or work of any kind; roughly speaking, it would be true to say that to be happy, is to be unknown. And yet these lives flowing calmly on as a river between its smiling banks must surely be dimly conscious at the last of a something missed, a something ungrasped that would have made them wiser and more human . . . and may be with the knowledge that happiness is not the chief and only good, and a dull sense of frustration, their existences are merged in the great ocean of eternity. To be happy always . . . not mere vulgar happiness, but the special one coveted . . . not to taste joy in sparse and precious morsels, with fierce interludes of longing and pain, but to dwell with it by night and day, to have it ever at the board—it would crush the genius out of any man or woman who ever lived. Had Byron's feet been alike, should we ever have heard of him? His superb capacity for enjoyment, his pre-eminent fitness for happiness in every form would probably have smothered the genius in him, he would have lived and died not an

active worshipper, but a passive one. The anguish of wounded pride stung him into deathless speech, just as privation and adversity have forced into the effort that ends in fame, those who in prosperity had been for ever obscure.

I wonder, is there one song of Burns that was not suggested by what he felt, or heard, or saw? Born of an emotion, an experience, an incident, it sprang living and real from the heart, as something known, not imagined, felt, not guessed, and being flashed down in hot blood, while its divine truth yet thrilled him, lives to us for ever and ever on the page of fame. He was not of those who shut themselves up evolving out of their inner consciousness, which may or may not be healthy, images, that if brilliant, are also likely to be eccentric and untrue to life, he was out and about, living, enjoying, suffering, observing the manifold phases of life passing before him in quick succession, ever throwing some new light upon his mind.

What are the deeds, the songs, the works that touch us most, bringing the tear to the eye, the throb to the heart—in a word, that make us rejoice in, and proud of, our humanity? Those that have arisen out of a noble impulse, a generous thought, a keen sympathy with the joys and sorrows of mankind—either of these is that touch of nature which makes the

whole world kin, and sets us laughing or weeping as the poet bids.

And it seems to me that writing should come, first, from what we experience, and observe in ourselves; secondly, in what we experience from, and discover in others. A man should be constantly accumulating something so that he may have the wherewithal to draw upon; and when one sees a man who should be at his brain work, idling about, smiling at a flower, standing still in the street to watch any one of those chance sights that, to the understanding eye, form an idyll or a tragedy, be sure that this man is enriching heart and brain, laying in a stock that he will draw upon later. To him all things are precious, and in the commonest, most vulgar surroundings he will discover a ray of humour and beauty—in a word, he will learn something.

I wonder no one has ever defined genius as the faculty of acute observation, with the twofold combination of an exquisite susceptibility to truthful impressions, and the power of uttering the same, whether in deed, work, or speech, magnificently. For to one man is given feeling, the power of a subtle and perfect appreciation of truth, that makes his mind a crystal mirror to reflect every shape and form of beauty, but, at the same time, is denied to

him the gift of expression; and while his life is a dumb poem, a sublime worship of his Creator (has not Plato said, "the good justly comes to be identified with God himself?") he is to those around him a clod, who utters naught, because he has naught to utter, but that he would speak, yet cannot. The mighty soul, bound in fleshly withies, travails inarticulately, or else struggles not at all, content *to be*, and, ceasing, leaves no trace. Yet who shall say that somewhere the store of beauty, to which he has silently added, is not the better for this humble existence that, in life and death alike, rises as an exhalation to its Maker?

Above him may there not be written—

"He is made one with Nature; there is heard
His voice in all her music— from the moan
Of thunder to the voice of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in night, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn that being to its own. . . .
He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely."

Although of one whose powers of expression were exquisite as his perception of the beautiful, who in early youth achieved immortality, yet died broken-hearted, not knowing that he had won it,

were these words written; yet I often think that the man who feels it all, the pathos, the beauty, the poetry of nature, yet never utters his delight, is he who worships and understands his Maker best.

I have seen a man stand before a picture, its beauty sinking into his soul as rain into moss, understanding it to the inmost fibre of his nature, yet no more capable of expressing his delight in it than he was of painting it. I have seen another to whom has been vouchsafed the gift (at best a tawdry one) of picturesque language pause before that same picture, and, without understanding or appreciating it one whit, turn aside to criticise it in such language as commanded every man's attention.

Take a third man, a keen observer, who has the nicest faculty of judgment, and the capacity of penetrating into and distinguishing between the differences of all things within his reach. But ten to one if this faculty of observation alone, wrought to its highest perfection, do not subordinate to it his appreciation of the beautiful, so that his speech, caustic, witty, and pregnant, may yet lack that touch of human nature which finds an echo in our hearts.

Thus one man feels, but cannot express, another expresses, but cannot feel; a third observes, but expresses half of the truth only. It is the triple combination that makes a man that vehicle of communi-

cation between the higher and lower ranks of intellect that we call genius.

I rouse myself with an effort—what is this? Daylight clear and pure as when it rises over Sieviking woods, is lighting yonder windows; for the rest, the room is in darkness, yet, when I ceased to read, not more, methought, than a few moments ago, the lamp was burning still, and the clock had just done striking one. I must have been dreaming for hours. Adieu, pale dreams! To-day, this first of October, the real business of my life begins; and the struggle I have so steadfastly sworn shall end in Sieviking and honour, commences.

CHAPTER V.

"There were three ladies in a ha',
Fine flowers i' the valley;
There came three knights among them a',
Wi' the red, green, and the yellow."

WITH the first December snow and rain comes Hetty, all rosy and blooming, a mere bundle of furs and velvets, yet contriving to look the softest, most beautiful thing imaginable, as she hugs us in turn, and vows she is rejoiced to be home again.

I suspect there is some hidden cause for this gay, good humour; that some little fount of sweetness within turns all to sunshine without, and I look keenly at her left hand, when by-and-by she comes to my side with all her fine trappings laid aside.

She catches my glance and shakes her head (we are alone), blushing a little, then says,

"But he's coming."

"Here?"

She nods—and Jove himself could not surpass the consequence of that nod.

"Brave Hetty," I say, patting her shoulder; "and now tell me how it all happened."

"He is an elder son," says Hetty, gravely; "but

he is plain Mister—Bell was furious because I would not accept a horrid, little old Duke, much older than Mr. Menzies, and without any teeth."

"That must have been a great sacrifice on your part," I say; "but perhaps this one has none either."

"He is very good looking," she cries, firing up; "but do you know (she drops her voice) I feel sure he thinks me a perfect little lump of stupidity and vanity, yet can't help liking me—isn't it odd?"

"Very—if your body had not happened to be so much better than your soul. But I'm beginning to have hopes of you, Hetty."

"I told him," says Hetty, "and Bell cried with rage when I told her I had done it, that we were very poor people; that we lived at the wrong end of London; that I had taken in the bread with my own hands; and that I had a brother in a *warehouse;* and when he asked where we lived I told him *Picotee Lane*, and he took out his pocket-book and wrote it down."

"And when did he ask you to be his wife, Hetty?"

"He has never asked me that," she says, hanging down her yellow head; "he has not even told me that he loves me, but I know it—he kept all other men away, and gave me no chance of liking anyone else."

"Hetty," I say, suddenly, "do you love this man?"

I find no answer in her blue eyes, the eyes that should be so much more earnest and beautiful than when she went away, they are shallow and sweet as ever; and I wish with all my heart I could see how—

"In her soul a grace hath reigned"

that might turn our pretty butterfly into a woman worthy of an honest man's love.

"And how—well, how respectable you are looking, Dick!" she says quickly, as Anak comes in.

"*Doesn't* he?" says the latter, looking at me with beaming pride; "and all of his own earnings, too—he saved eighty pounds out of the hundred John James gave him for his fees, by getting the scholarship, and when he sent it back the old boy refused to take it—said Dick had earned it—so Dick's a Crœsus, and we've all got clothes now that were *made* for us."

"And Dick cuts up bodies—*real* bodies," says the Squiffer, with relish; "and people have to stand in a row while he looks down their throats. He's going to take *me* round the wards with him one day; won't it be fine?"

"I'm not afraid of what I should *see*," says Solomon, deliberately; "but I won't go there, especially

when there are bodies about, for fear something might happen."

"You're afraid," says the Squiffer, contemptuously; "*I* ain't."

"I'm not," says Solomon; "but I read in a book, the other day, that the galvanic process was once tested upon the body of a man who had been hanged for murdering his wife. Well, when it was applied first to the face, the corpse's jaw began to quiver, the muscles were fearfully contorted, and one eye actually opened. Presently the right hand was raised and clenched, the legs and thighs began to move, and everyone present thought he was on the point of being restored to life."

"Well," says Anak, "and what of that? It frightened 'em a bit, I 'spose, I think it would me; but what harm could the poor beggar do anybody if he was dead?"

"But he did," says Solomon, in a sepulchral voice. "When the right hand was raised in the way I told you of, it struck one of the men standing by, who died *that very afternoon* of the shock."

"Don't talk such a pack of rubbish," I say, rousing myself from thoughts of Hetty and Hetty's lover; "come, are we to have any tea to-night.

The round table is all the brighter for our pretty girl. For a few days the house is gay with her

laughter and happy voice; but when a week has gone by she begins to droop, she starts at every sound, and into her eyes comes that look of anxious listening that is never seen where a woman's course of true love is running smooth.

"I told you so," writes Bell about this time. "How could you expect to see any more of a man who knew you lived in *Picotee Lane?* And he is likely to be even a better match than the Duke, for through the death of his cousin, last week, he is now heir presumptive to the marquisate of D——. You chose to be guided by a school-boy's advice instead of mine, and now you see the consequences."

"I am not sorry I told him, though," says Hetty with unconscious worldliness, "because I am certain that if he ever found me out deceiving him in the least thing, he would never marry me."

"If he is worth his salt he will come," I say; "it is a poor love that is dependent on circumstances and surroundings. If the name of Picotee Lane has frightened him away, you are well rid of him."

But I have little leisure for Hetty's love troubles; work, hard by day, harder still by night, absorbs me entirely. Often I do not go to bed at all; but when at morning I open my study door, I never fail to find Green Sleeves, with cup and platter beside

her, containing the food that I have not felt the lack of till I see it.

Green Sleeves!—little heart!—I do not think that in these days we fully realise how much of the peace and happiness of our little home is due to thy bright and gentle presence.

One Sunday, hard on Christmas, we are all, save Hetty, eating our roast beef with appetite, when there comes a double knock, not a loud, but a firm one, at our modest front door.

"Gilly," I say, pausing in the act of carving Anak's third helping, "he said he'd come and see us some Sunday. You girls had better let me see if he's too screwed to see ladies, before you come into the other room."

"I'll open the door to him," says Anak, who has not previously seen him, and whose invariable method it is to keep people waiting on the doorstep while he exhaustively (and sometimes audibly) scans them through the letter-box slit.

"Open the door gently," I say, as he sets off, "because perhaps Gilly will come in head foremost" —instructions that Anak improves upon by a more lengthened application than usual of one eye to the slit, and so very gradual an opening of the door that he is himself only visible to the visitor by instalments.

"You can come in, Mr. Gilly," he says, in a patronizing tone, on discovering him still to retain the perpendicular, and he shuts the door and stalks noisily before him into the parlour. "Dick rather expected you to-day,—he'll be in directly—but perhaps you're hungry, and would like a slice of beef? No offence, you know—but I don't 'spose you get roast beef every day; no more do we."

But "Mr. Gilly," who is known not to be ashamed of his poverty, "has lunched."

"You'll have something to drink, then," says Anak, generously, and rattling the money in his pocket (all this I hear subsequently). "I got my wages at the warehouse last night, you know; and there's a pub. round the corner."

But Mr. Gilly is understood to say he is not thirsty.

"Ah! had too much last night, perhaps," says Anak. (There is nothing like knowing another man has a vice that you yourself have not, for breeding a fine contempt of him.) "When I've done dinner I'll fetch you some soda water—though I will say this for you, that you don't *look* like a person who gets tight every night—when he can afford the luxury."

Mr. Gilly here bursts out into a laugh that reassures Anak, who is beginning to think that there

is considerably more starch in Gilly's disposition and linen than he should have expected from my description of him.

"Ha! ha! ha!" goes Anak, "how we have roared, to be sure, over your lighting yourself to bed with the cheese, and shutting up the cupboard with the lighted candle inside it, where Dick found it when he came home!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" goes Mr. Gilly, convulsed with mirth.

"And the time when a student came to borrow a shilling of you, and you were as hard up as he was, and had popped everything but what you stood up in, so you took out your false teeth and got five shillings on the gold setting—every penny of which you gave him."

Mr. Gilly is understood to repudiate the noble deed of charity ascribed to him.

"You must have looked awfully queer without 'em," says Anak, "being your four front ones—though 'pon my word they look so real that I should never have known they were false. Well, I must go and finish my dinner. Dick'll be in directly. Here's an album if you'd like to look at it."

Mr. Gilly opens it, and exclaims,—

"Ah!—Hetty?"

"Miss Hetty, if you please," says Anak, from the

door with great hauteur. "My sisters are not used to being called by their Christian names out of their own family."

And his manner is still majestic when he rejoins us.

I don't know what possesses Hetty, who has been changing colour ever since Anak left the room, to jump up as he re-enters it, as if about to ask a question; but never heeding her, he goes straight to his dinner, and she sits down again.

"I wish Gilly wouldn't come at such awkward times," he says, in a grumbling voice; "especially if he isn't hungry—and he won't have anything to drink either. He's not a bit like what you sketched him, Dick—he's as decent looking as you are—and decenter."

"He must have come into a fortune since yesterday, then—for he was worse than ever when I saw him at hospital."

"He doesn't know his manners towards ladies," says Anak, scowling; "he had the impudence to call Hetty, *Hetty*, so I took him down a peg or two."

"Why, Gilly!" I say, entering the parlour a minute later, stopping short, however, as I discover the man who occupies it to be no "Gilly," but an utter stranger.

"I am Ullathorne," he says, advancing, "and you are Sieviking?"

As we grip hands, the feeling that prevails with me is less one of surprise than of wonder. How came such a man as this to fall in love with our Hetty? For, though he is young, not more than half-a-dozen years my senior, there is that in his face which marks him out from the ordinary men of his class; not only is there as much sense as birth in his face, but he looks as if he took life in earnest, and could, on occasion, think.

"I seem to know you quite well, Sieviking; I've heard so much of you," he says, abruptly. "Your brother says I mayn't call your sister, *Hetty*. What do you say?"

"Do you love her?" I say, as abruptly as he.

"Yes. I should have been here weeks ago, but for my father's illness."

"You see our circumstances," I continue, in the same tone; "they are not likely to be better for many years, if ever. What will your family say to your seeking a wife in such a place as this?"

"I have only two relatives—my father and uncle —and they are both, like Barkis, willing."

"And you love her?" I persist.

"Why not? She is sweet tempered, obedient, truthful——"

When a man has to argue his reasons for loving a woman, be sure that he is as anxious to convince himself as his hearer; at every word Ullathorne speaks I feel more and more convinced that he no more loves Hetty with all the force of which he is capable, than she possesses the power of understanding such love did she inspire it.

"And beautiful," I add, dryly. "Are you sure that her whole attraction for you does not lie in her beauty—a quality which should be looked for only after certain other essentials in a wife?"

He turns suddenly.

"You think we are unsuited to each other?"

"So far as I can judge in the few moments I have seen you—yes."

"Sieviking," he says, after he has taken a few turns up and down the room, "I wont affect to misunderstand you—but, beyond a certain point, is not your honesty a wrong to your sister? I expected a great deal of you, but not such disinterestedness as this, for you have not known me long enough to have conceived a friendship for me."

I do not immediately answer him, for I could not tell him, even if I would, how something stronger even than the love of a brother for a sister was within the past few moments stirred within me; how in this man before me I seem to see the realisation of that dream of "My ain friend," that I have long

ago given up expecting to find, least of all in Hetty's husband.

"I like you," I say curtly, "I think this marriage would be a mistake. I love Hetty dearly, but she would never satisfy you—you are best apart. Her tears for you will be quickly dried by another lover."

Tactless idiot that I am, a hero even could not bear to imagine himself supplanted; it is the one vulnerable point in Achilles' heel, if Achilles stand to represent mankind, by a wound in which he is invariably overthrown.

And, alas! Hetty's lovely face smiling up at Ullathorne from the open page that his ill-luck has planted hard by, serves to complete his disgrace in the eyes of one who, never having experienced the follies of love (or that hotness of the blood misnamed love), profoundly despises them.

"I told her that I should come," he says, involuntarily. "What would she think if I did not?"

"I will take care that she knows the truth," I answer, some inward force compelling me, against my will, to make one last effort to stay him. Surely this is one of those occasions when our good angel gives voice through us, and seeks to avert the calamities that in our blindness we would bring down upon our heads?

Not for many a long day—not until bitter

estrangement has crept in 'twixt me and thee, my man-friend, my Jonathan, whose soul, knit unto mine in this first hour of meeting, is loosed but by the cold hand of Death itself—do I know how if this day I might have prevailed with thee, much of the misery of the future might yet have been averted.

But he does not heed me, he is listening to a step without.

"Can't I see my little girl?" he asks with the impatience of a man who, having decided against his better judgment, desires no time left him for thought.

"I will send her to you"—and I go in search of Hetty. She is alone in the little back parlour staring out at the driving sleet and snow, and my heart smites me for the part I have been acting towards her, as I see how pale she is, but wounded vanity will sometimes pale a woman's cheek as effectually as a wounded heart.

"Hetty," I say, sitting down beside her, "there is somebody in the other room who would like to see you."

"Yes," I know, she says listlessly, "Mr. Gilly."

"No—not Mr. Gilly."

She turns swiftly, such a rosy light of incredulous delight on her face as makes me think she loves him well enough to give some hope for their happiness yet.

"Dick—*him?*"

"Yes."

"When I heard the knock, I thought it was—I wanted to call out to Anak not to go, but I could not, and when he came back and said it was *Mr. Gilly*, I could have cried."

"He is a good fellow, Hetty," I say, patting her head; "try and deserve him if you can. And now had not you better go to him?"

"There is no hurry," says Hetty, demurely, who, like every other average woman, will cry her eyes out for, or be prepared to run a mile to meet her lover if he does not come, yet when he is safely within her reach, will not fail to keep him waiting.

"Such coquetry may do for some men, but it won't do for him," I say, sternly. "If you are going, go this minute, or I'll tell him you don't want him."

She goes instantly, without even a glance at the looking-glass. Alas! poor Hetty! You want a firm hand, a hand with a touch of the brute in it, which Ullathorne's has not, to make a decent woman of you.

"A woman, a spaniel, a walnut tree,
The more you beat 'em the better they be."

There is more of sound truth, less of ruffianism, in the homely old proverb than the world now-a-days guesses.

CHAPTER VI.

"Up then spak the Queen o' Fairies,
Out o' a bush o' rye;
She's ta'en away the bonniest knight
In a' my companie."

"LOVERS are queer creatures, eh, Green Sleeves?" And Green Sleeves shakes her brown head wisely, and answers, "Very."

We are sitting in the back parlour looking out at the close folded green buds of the cherry tree within which the white flowers are swelling;—by the time they shall have burst their sheaths and spread themselves to the sun, it will be Hetty's wedding day.

We can hear the murmur of voices on the other side of the thin wall, but presently they will cease, for conversation, save when of a strictly personal character, is apt to languish between the sweethearts. Ten to one but in a few minutes Ullathorne will come in, and sitting down by Green Sleeves, commence one of those passages at arms with her of which he never seems to weary, and in which he is as often overthrown as victorious.

To draw her out, to rouse and provoke her into an argument, to play on her moods, his mind seem-

ing to flash on, or borrow from hers lights so rare and beautiful that I listen sometimes in admiration and wonder, this is his delight, and one that on his every visit here he rarely forgoes.

These children with their instincts, how they set the trained intelligence of manhood at fault; they hit truth in the bull's-eye, and know not their own power; and thoughts profound and inspired fall from their lips as though God himself spoke through them.

These two, a whole lifetime of years between them, influence each other in an extraordinary manner. Apart, neither is at his best; together, one seems the complement of the other, and to call into being all that is noblest and most brilliant in either.

Since Green Sleeves came to us, she being my constant companion, I have been able to teach her much; but all the knowledge she has acquired has lain dormant till Ullathorne's bright intelligence vivifies and brings it to light, as the colours that lurk unseen in a flower till called forth by the rays of the sun.

Beautiful Hetty, standing by, and meditating on her wedding gown, listens sometimes with a dull sense of wonder, in which no faintest ray of comprehension mingles.

Hetty for wife, Green Sleeves for companion,

Dick for friend; in these days I think Ullathorne desires no more. He is happy; he feels no lack in Hetty, since there are others close by to supply the need; and yet—and yet—it is with a growing sense of future trouble that I see the days go by which elapse before the words are spoken that make Ullathorne and Hetty one. I said to the child yesterday,—

"Green Sleeves, how is it that you are not bright, and witty, and clever with me, as you are with Mr. Ullathorne? Is it that you take less trouble to please me?"

She looked at me for a moment, then said,—

"*He* is Ullathorne; *you* are Mr. Dick."

Somehow I understood by that, how she meant that people who love each other don't talk clever, or even have the most enlivening effect upon each other; they are content just to breathe, exist, be happy together; the perfect independence necessary for the free play of the intellect is almost incompatible with that trembling dependence upon another for happiness that may be characterised as the very essence of love.

And I felt relieved; for lately, knowing how prone very young girls are to worship not knowing what they worship, and with an intensity of feel*ing* to which in future years they will look back in wonder, I have had some fears for her.

And so the days go by; different ones, these, to those thoughtless, ignorant ones at Sieviking, where we lived the lives of unthinking animals, and indulged in that recklessness of mirth that is almost as conducive to deterioration of character as a sullen, revengeful discontent. The preparations for the marriage are simple enough; they would have been very different had I consented to the wish of Ullathorne's father that the wedding should take place from the house that he never leaves. The sisters, too, would have had her married from one or other of their houses, and Hetty was nothing loth; but when—Ullathorne and I both thinking alike on the point—these offers were refused also, Hetty acquiesced, merely skimping her wedding gown to make ampler the travelling dress that would at least be seen on her arrival at Y——.

And so it falls that one morning, the pure white blossoms of the cherry-tree looking in at the open window reflect themselves in the bridal attire of the pretty creature who stands within, an hour old wife, by her husband's side.

But on Ullathorne's face is no joy, only a look of doubt, of awakening; there is something terrible to me in the eyes that leave Hetty's lovely face to seek a childish one hard by, a revelation of what the possibilities might have been, of what the realities

are, that make me fear for the future of more lives than one.

Involuntarily as from a peril, I snatch the child's hand and draw her back, but his gaze has left her; it is bent on Hetty, as though in that beautiful, uncomprehending, happy face he desperately sought safety. Ah, me! that a man's hopes should be ventured on aught so frail! Even with Anak, as master of the ceremonies, there is little mirth; indeed, he has never got over the shock caused by his mistaking Ullathorne for Gilly; it is a relief when all is over, the farewells made, and Hetty, in her delicate dress, is descending the steps, already enfolded in the honour of her husband's name and position, the past life of poverty cast behind her easily as a worn-out glove—I could have better hopes of her future did she less eagerly and lightly enter on it.

It might be Bell or Cynthia who enters with such grace the splendid carriage, but it is Ullathorne's very self who turns back at the last moment to wring the hands, to look hard in the face of my Lady Green Sleeves. And now they are off, Anak at the very moment of their departure tying on unperceived a favour to the back of the chariot, so that smiles, and may be a good wish or two, will follow them all along the road.

CHAPTER VII.

"Shyning was the painted ha',
Wi' gladsum torches bricht,
Full twenty gowden dames sat there
And ilk ane by a knicht;
Wi' music cheer,
To please the ear,
When bewtie pleased the sight."

THE season is in full swing; the Hungerfords, Longleats, Ullathornes, a perfect colony of our fine relations congregate at one end of the town, while we paupers grub on in the blessed content that must surely have something low in it at the other.

Unobserved, I sometimes stand in a rare fit of idleness at the railings in the Park with the other *canaille*, and hear opinions expressed with a rich flavour and a truth that they can't expect to hear in aristocratic circles, passed in turn on my three sisters, as on their hacks in the morning, or carriages in the afternoon, they pass in review before this most critical section of the British public.

I gather from these enlightened individuals that Bell is a fine figure of a woman, though in her case that solidity of proportion which usually stands sponsor for steadiness of morals is not to be trusted,

as other cavaliers than Sir Peter are usually to be seen at her bridle-rein. On Cynthia much the same judgment is passed, while Hetty is pronounced very pretty, but "bored-like and m'appen she'd look more lively if she'd got somebody else's husband alongside of her."

But I also enjoy the honour of seeing my sisters —especially Hetty—in their own houses occasionally. It was with some doubt, and not a little of condescension that the latter, as on one of her rare visits home she came fluttering one day into my den, invited me to dinner, being most particular to impress upon me that I need not be in the least uneasy or afraid, as half the people I should meet were very stupid indeed, and if I only held my tongue I should pass muster with anybody.

"My poor girl," I said, her being grown so very fine a lady in these few short weeks, relieving me of any fear of giving her pain, "I never was one of those people who feel big in a small house, and crushed in a great one, and I am glad to find that you are so equal to your changed estate. If I should come I promise to observe your deportment narrowly, and to be guided by it, while as to such trifling breaches of good breeding as eating with my knife, or making a quotation that nobody understands, why you know I am never guilty of such."

"You are very unkind," says Hetty, with tears

in her eyes. "You know I did not mean that I was ashamed of you, and no one ever scolds me like this, not even Ullathorne."

"I suppose not," I say drily, "and prosperity, and having everything your own way, is bad for you, Miss Hetty. I don't know any worse training for a young woman who wants keeping in order than to get married—unless she marries her master; and though I think you've done that, and yet a woman of fashion has fifty ways of eluding her husband's eye, and I've even known the mere possession of a fine establishment to develop a silly pride and vain glory in weak minds."

"I won't bear it," cries Hetty, starting up, her flushed face the only bit of colour about her, she being in white as usual, as I think all women should be so long as they are handsome and young.

"Then be true to your better self," I say, sternly; "is it by fine lady airs such as these that you think to win and keep Ullathorne, whose heart is of gold?"

"To win him?" she says, her colour paling; "and have I not won him—why else did he marry me?"

"Hetty," I say, drawing her towards me, "have you ever thought of how you must try and live up to Ullathorne, not expect him to live down to you?"

"We are quite happy together," she says, turning her head aside; "we never disagree. No two people could get on better. What more can you—does he —want?"

"Has he never told you, Hetty?" I say, sadly.

"He talks to me sometimes like you do, but I do not understand him; I never could understand clever people—we are happy, that is enough for me."

Alas! poor Hetty, if she feels no lack, how is it to be supplied? But, thank God! she is happy, and, as I know, the fault is not all on her side.

"You will come then, Dick? You must not be vexed with Ullathorne for not coming down here; but he is so busy always."

"I know, but I see him most days; he comes to me at hospital."

"He never told me that. I do believe," she adds, half bitterly, "that he's fonder of you than he is of me! Well, good-bye; I shall expect you."

"Hetty, you've forgotten something; ever since you were married you've forgotten it."

"What is that?"

"To ask Pink May to your house."

"O! Dick! Think of it, her cap, her heels, her train!"

"I won't have her slighted. Who kept us all from starvation, who is feeding and housing us now but that dear, good, loving soul? Go and ask her

for the same evening you've asked me, and then I'll think about coming."

"The servants will all laugh, Dick; it really is impossible."

"Then so is my going to you. There, run along, I've wasted enough time already."

"If you'll promise that she does'nt wear a blue, or a pink, or a scarlet cap——"

"I'll promise nothing. If she wore three, one a-top of the other, I'd not be ashamed of her; and I'd give any flunkey who laughed at her a sound thrashing."

Hesitation, sulks. By and bye a rustling of departing skirts above stairs, my behest done, and presently, God bless thee, thou simple soul! a comical little figure seats itself at my elbow, and gravely takes me in council concerning the superior merits of blue over orange, and pink over magenta.

I abandon science for millinery. I forbid all colours, and am proof against her petitions even with tears for a little pink. It is a subdued, and even elegant Pink May that a few evenings later enters Hetty's drawing room on my arm.

I begin to understand Hetty's temporary intoxication better as she advances to meet us with Ullathorne at her side, passing down through the splendid rooms with as haughty a step as if she had never trod any other.

I am one of those who love that

"Beauty should go beautifully,"

but it seems to me that the luxury and magnificence beyond limit that surrounds the upper-class women of the present day must infallibly embellish the body at the expense or the utter extinction of the soul.

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, with everything to feed all three —what wonder that one's duty to one's neighbour, the whole pith and marrow, I take it, of all religions, neglected as unacted lies, while the life of every average man and woman is one profound, sinful adoration of self?

"Why, Dick!" says a gay voice behind me, and, turning, I see Bell, blooming and handsome as ever. "So you will come to Hetty, when you won't come to me? I felt sure you wouldn't be awkward—I declare you look quite natural in your clothes!"

"I hired them for a week, and have been going out as waiter every evening to give myself assurance," I say, drily.

"As cross as ever," she says, laughing, "and fortunately as handsome. I don't despair of your distinguishing yourself yet—by marriage, of course —there's no other royal road to wealth that I know of. I have *views* for you—dinner, thank Heaven! and that little horror, Lord Cosmo, is my fate; but Hetty's cook is good, so it might be worse—for instance, good company and a bad dinner."

"Florizel," says Hetty's voice close by, "allow me to introduce to you my brother"—and that is all, so I make up my mind that the young lady who is presently walking down stairs on my arm is one of those unfortunates to whom her parents have been more kind than Providence, and who cannot hope to get the better of circumstance until she takes to herself a husband.

"What an insignificant atom one feels in a house like this," she says, as we enter the dining-room, whose walls are peopled by pictures dim as Rembrandt's, the king of shadows.

"Yes; the people here remind me of what Empedocles said of the Agrigentines, 'that they built as if they were to live for ever, and feasted as if they were to die to-morrow.'"

My place at table is not far from Ullathorne's; he looks across at me with a smile as we sit down. We have met before to-day, but in very different company to what we are in to-night—and yet we must all come to that by which he and I stood this morning.

"You are great friends, are you not?" says my companion.

"Yes."

I am hunting for Pink May, and find her at last, wedged in between an old buck and a young divine, and with an air of being equally happy with either that is certain to command attention from both.

I turn to find my companion's eyes fixed upon me with such earnestness as to convince me that I am no stranger to her by hearsay, if by acquaintance.

"Well?" I say, smiling.

"There!" she says. "So you *can* smile—I was just wondering if by any possibility you could."

"Do I look so bad-tempered?"

"No—but austere as a St. Augustine. I think I should like to look like that—sometimes; it would make my occasional good humour so precious. Who was it said that the genialities of a stern man are as effective as the asperities of an amiable one?"

"I think, Miss Florizel," I say, "that you and I scarcely start on equal ground. You evidently know something of me—probably to my disadvantage—while of you I know no more than that you are named after one of Shakespeare's heroines."

"I won't deny it," she says, returning my keen gaze steadily; "I *have* heard of you often from Hetty—and Ullathorne."

"Then," I say, gravely, "you are aware that this is my first evening out, that I have been studying the book of dinner etiquette (kindly sent me by one of my sisters, with certain passages in it *marked*) for over a week, and that I am dreadfully afraid of opening my mouth, lest something should tumble out quite unfitted for polite society. Now, supposing

you tell me who some of the people are, while I study their manners?"

"And so lay bare to you my own character!" she says, slyly; "however, for my own sake I'll try not to be too spiteful."

"Then you will be dull—a woman is never so epigrammatic as when she is dissecting her friends' characters. Indeed, one who talks like poor Poll at ordinary times becomes positively brilliant under the influence of malice—do you deny it?"

"No; but malice is not always responsible for the pungent things said at another person's expense. Remember that by praising the absent you usually offend, and never amuse; and to amuse, if she is not beautiful, is a woman's first duty in society."

"To be sure," I say, drily; "that is just my notion of them when they happen to be neither wives, sisters, nor daughters. But to continue——"

"You shall not put me out of countenance," cries Florizel. "Confess, now, that you can't go on for ever and ever saying how clever, or good, or charming some particular person is—the subject becomes dull, is quickly exhausted; but what a wide field opens out to your wit (and what is wit, as Lord Lytton asks, but truth made amusing?) animation, and powers of sarcasm in attacking his weaknesses and follies! What vigour of expression is yours, what a warmth of imagination, since for one-half that

you know, you must surmise the other, till after half an hour's warm abuse you are in such a glow as almost to love the abused person for the pleasure he has afforded you in abusing him."

She pauses, out of breath and laughing.

"It is very bad," she says, gravely, "but it is human nature. In the same way we always hear of the misfortunes and failures of our friends; but it is a very long while before the story of their successes reaches us. We smile over a bad review of our dearest friend's new book, but somehow the paper with the favourable notice gets mislaid on its way to our hands."

"Are you not very bitter for so young a woman?" I say, looking at her keenly.

"Perhaps," she says, turning her head aside, but not before I have seen how in her face is less a look of disappointment than of that want which one sees so often in women whose lives utterly fail to satisfy their souls. I glance round the table. Ullathorne is in a brown study. Hetty, at the opposite end, leans back as she converses with her neighbour; already she has acquired that exquisite air of boredom without which it is impossible to be a real fine lady. And to think that she once stole small-clothes, and clothed herself in the proceeds! I wish the Chancellor were by to see her now.

If I came here to see husband and wife to-

gether, to glean some hint of their conduct and relations to each other, I am doomed to disappointment. I see only how easy it is in a life such as this for the tie between husband and wife to be a slack one, and no one be the wiser, scarcely even themselves.

Bell is eating her dinner with a magnificent contempt for consequences in the shape of fat, that compels my admiration. Sir Peter is studying his *menu* as if it were the Book of Fate. Pink May is bridling and coquetting to her heart's content, and, in a pause of the conversation, is overheard relating the oft-told tale of the delicacy of her complexion when a young girl.

A little pompous man opposite, sitting next to a lady who looks as if her enemies had been shooting roses at her with pop-guns, fixes my attention; evidently some one in his own estimation, I am anxious to know what position he holds in the eyes of others.

"That is Lord Beaudésert," says Florizel, when appealed to. "His one object in life is to pass for a wit and *raconteur* of the first order. His stories are usually good ones, of which he is himself the hero; and in telling them he invariably gives as the things that he *did* say, those that he *ought* to have said. I think Gil Blas must have had him in his mind when he described a man 'whose wit shone at the expense of his memory.' I often feel tempted to cry out at one of his stories, 'An old sixty!' as

people did in Philip of Macedon's time, when anything borrowed was passed off as original."

"They managed things better in Rome," I say, laughing, "where the citizens used to take out their slaves to evening parties to jest for them, and, at every shout of laughter provoked by them, assumed an air of modesty, as if they had said all the good things themselves—it must have saved them a lot of trouble."

"But rather hard lines on the jesters, or flies, as Plautus called them; for they were soundly beaten if they failed to amuse, and got their pates cracked if they didn't crack jokes to their owners' liking."

"All that is to be altered, soon," I say, seriously, "and the laziest people will shine by no exertion of their own, according to the state of things imagined by a certain ingenious and scientific poet, in which we consist of an *internal* body and an *external* soul."

"There would, in most cases, be more within than without," says Florizel; "but about laughter—I envy anyone who has the power of making others laugh. It is a great gift. Rabelais remarks, that the wearers of crown and sceptre are born under the same constellation as the wearers of cap and bells."

"And who gave you Rabelais to read?" I say, quietly.

"Women read of their own accord, sometimes, I assure you," she says, demurely, "and even—think. Now, do you know that, except to you, I should not

have dared to make one single remark that I have made to-night? I should be voted pedantic, insufferable; one never *talks*, you know in polite society."

"You would deserve to be punished if you did. Is it not Lucian who, after relating how a mob ill-treated a certain philosopher for attacking their superstitions, adds, 'And very justly; for what right had he to be wise among so many mad men?'"

"Let us talk nonsense," she says, abruptly; "let us be spiteful. You see that old-young lady next but one to Lady Hungerford? Well, ten years ago, she worked her wedding veil of Honiton lace, but no one has ever given her the opportunity of wearing it yet."

"She should go to Galway Fair."

"What do they do there?" asks Florizel, curiously.

"It is just like the London market of young women for marriage, only that over there they manage it in an honest, straightforward manner. When fair-time comes round, the lasses dress themselves in their best, and, their avowed purpose being matrimony, go through their paces before the assembled lads, who critically survey them, and make their choice, or not, as they feel disposed. Miss Florizel," I add abruptly, "is this dinner going on *for ever?*"

"Console yourself—it is three parts over."

"But for you," I say, bluntly, "I could not have sat here one-half of the time I have done already."

And, indeed, as I look around, the table, the dishes, the people, the whole scene, combine to stifle and oppress me. . . . . involuntarily I recal the tale of how Buddha, when perplexed and troubled by that ceaseless striving after light that gave him no rest, one night awoke to find his apartment full of the dancing girls who had sought to soothe him to slumber. Some of them lay tossing heavily in their sleep, some with open mouths, others coiled up in uncouth shapes; it seemed to him as if his apartment was full of loathsome bodies, and that all was vanity. And, rising up, he caused his fleetest horse to be saddled, and rode away from the palace that was to him but a tainted temple of the flesh, and to which he never returned.

What a life to live—to eat, drink, sleep, and to-morrow—to die? Not a bit of it, to begin all over again, as if the body, not the soul, survived.

"What a happy looking couple," I say, glancing with a sense of relief at two fresh young faces at a little distance. "Are they going to be married?"

"Yes—don't they remind you a little of Artemus Ward's 'And have I found you at larst, O! at larst?' and the answer, 'Yes, marm, but if you had come at fust you would have found me sooner?' But I believe he really is fond of her—I have a conclusive reason for thinking so."

"And that is?"

"Don't laugh, but he was in love—deeply, every one thought, with a lovely young woman, who was plump almost to a fault. All at once he forsook her for little Lady Bell, who is slight also to a fault. Now, the fascination must be extraordinary that detaches a man from a fat woman to a lean one—*ergo*, he must be really in love with Lady Bell, don't you see?"

But her last words remain suspended in the air like a big note of interrogation—they do not please me. Without knowing what women should say, I am instinctively aware of what they should not.

"Mr. Sieviking," says a soft voice presently—a voice that seems to have a blush in it, and turning I see Florizel's countenance painted with that which is to a woman's face what a rainbow is to the sky.

"It is not your fault," I say, thinking aloud, "it is the pestilential air you breathe. But why should you care for my good opinion, Miss Florizel?"

"I do care," she says; and the intensity of her voice startles me. "If there were more men like you, girls would be different——"

"Miss Florizel," I say, abruptly, "I will tell you a secret. I have for some time been in danger of becoming a prig; a little encouragement from you, or any one else who feeds my vanity will about finish the business. If you look up to me I must shun your society, for nothing in the world but being in the

company of people every way my superior can cure my complaint."

"Then you must not approach me in the drawing-room, presently," she says, laughing, as she rises and follows Hetty out, leaving me to the enjoyment of company that (with the exception of Ullathorne) is by no means an improvement on that which has just left me.

Odd, irregular, attractive, Florizel's face comes between me and my ears as I sit by Ullathorne's side drinking my claret.

"I should think you and Florizel must be *starving*," says Bell, an hour later, in the drawing-room. "I did not see either of you eat a mouthful during the whole of dinner; you were talking at such a rate. But, seriously," she adds, dropping her voice, "I'm delighted that you got on so well together—it is just as brilliant a chance of settling yourself in life as any one of us girls ever have had. Her father, the old earl, adores her; she is the only child, and her fortune will be immense; and, as I always told you, Dick, you are a very good-looking fellow, and when you have mastered one or two minor points of etiquette that I will presently tell you of, I see no reason why you should not be good enough for anybody."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Hey, ninnie, nonnie! But love be bonnie
A little while, while it is new;
But when it's auld, it grows more cauld,
And fades awa' like morning dew."

TIME flies; it seems yesterday that Hetty was married, yet I went to-day to see her as she lay on her white couch with another tiny Hetty on her arm, and returning home I noticed with wonder that the old cherry-tree was again in bloom.

As she held the little creature against her breast I wondered if beneath all its frivolities a mother's heart was beating there, and thought I traced in her beautiful face something of that solemn, wistful look that motherhood they say always brings—as though the Divine breath, kindling the young life, had in passing touched the mother also, and made her sacred.

I looked at Ullathorne, too, as he stood beside them; there was something new, hopeful in his face —hitherto I could not but blame him, for did he try, with all his heart and soul did he try, to make the best of that mistake in life which with eyes wide open he had committed?

I left them, trusting that those baby hands might yet bring the hearts of father and mother together, but alas! with returning health the old Hetty arises, the little child, gift of God, like any soulless toy, is laid aside. The old frown comes back to Ullathorne's brow, the weariness to his voice. If nowadays, not knowing, I should chance to meet him, I should esteem him as neither more nor less than one of those idlers upon whom the waste of life is regretted by none more keenly than himself.

He has never crossed our threshold since his marriage day, but we are constantly together, the love between us growing deeper and deeper, nothing broken by the secret that lies between us, till sometimes I say to myself, conscience-stricken, that it is small marvel he has so little to give to Hetty.

If only they would disagree sometimes—but there are no contests between them. There is simply a total lack of appreciation on her part, an incapacity on his to move or reach her, that completely stultify any notion of warfare. Bell and Cynthia observe nothing amiss; I should soon hear of it if they did, for I see them often enough, they having taken me in hand, and stood sponsor for me, so to speak, at the fount of fashion.

They have given up tormenting me on the subject of marriage, being satisfied in the belief that my heart has accompanied Florizel to Cannes,

whither she went three months ago with the old man, as the sole remaining chance of extending his life a few years.

And time goes on, and lo! one fine day a white petal flutters down on the dusty page from which I am reading, and I look up to discover how Nature through the cherry-tree gives warning of another dead and gone year. And what have I gained in it? A profound knowledge of my own ignorance—what is knowledge but the consciousness of ignorance—the germ of the feeling of Michael Angelo with his go-cart, and the motto "Still I learn?"

I have not amassed one penny; I am not one step nearer Sieviking. I falter and stumble sometimes on the path, so rough is it, so devoid of hope and encouragement.

But for the happy home life, and the mark it leaves upon me (I think one can mostly tell by a man's face the character of his nearest and dearest —he is their reflection; as they make him, so is he, ill-humoured or noble, false or true), I should be in danger of becoming that most disagreeable of all spectacles, a man ill at ease with himself and his Maker, a state of things usually brought about by his own misconduct—or his misfortunes, which are equally damning.

I love my work, but I would see some substantial reward for it; and in this I degrade Science,

since he only can study it truly who does so for pure love of it.

There is one gap in our home circle. Six months ago Anak left us to join the Natal Mounted Police, and prodigious epistles in his best round-hand reach us from time to time with accounts of his doings; while to one private and particular fight, in which he signally defeated a bully of the name of Bill, he devotes four whole pages of sanguinary details.

I found Jill crying over one of these letters the other day. She has made up her mind that her boy will never come back, and would start off to Zululand if she dared, in search of him. I laughed at, and comforted her, not knowing how in a day yet to be born the nation's heart would quiver through and through with anguish for her slain children; how from end to end the world should heave with a great throb of horror, shame, and pity, while from every eye should rain down unbidden such tears of blood as hitherto no reverse of war, however severe, had caused to flow!

Thank God that my poor Jill, as she kisses and lays aside her boy's letter, cannot read the future.

That she will see him once again ere that terrible, never-to-be-forgotten morning, when at a thousand peaceful, happy breakfast tables, from the carelessly unfolded paper, will leap out the death-news

that shall strike to the heart how many a sister, wife, and mother! When, with desperate eyes, that sickeningly seek that which she fears to find, far down on the ghastly list she will see the name of Sieviking.

Some one was to blunder, and our Anak, and such as he, were to pay the penalty with their lives . . . and how nobly, how grandly, that penalty was to be paid, the page of history should tell to all time.

Page most shameful, most bitter, most glorious in England's history, so long as hearts can beat and eyes can weep, shall ye be remembered, and over the graves of your heroes need no flowers be planted, no monuments raised, for in the hearts of the nation will their names live for ever and ever.

Poor Anak . . . Jill will cry night and day—as though one who died such a death as he, could be reckoned poor . . . in life, we called thee good, brave and strong, Anak, but no one ever called thee poor . . . and now, maybe thou art rich, Anak, not poor, beyond aught that thou ever wast on earth!

But I am projecting my story many years. We are happy yet. Our numbers are unbroken, and even threaten to be added to, as Kit, in a recent letter, talks of coming home.

Solomon and the Squiffer grow apace, and have turned to such good advantage the schooling that by painful economy we have contrived to give them, as to well fit either to take a clerkship shortly—when he can get it.

John James pays us periodical visits; he takes the most intense interest in my progress, and is firmly convinced that some day he will have occasion to take pride in it also.

And Pink May, God bless her! is the same as ever. She wears a little more pink in her caps, perhaps, and any trifling improvement in our circumstances is always visible in an increased length of tail.

She has had a proposal, too, from our landlord, who was much displeased at her refusal. He had no idea, he said, that poor people could be so proud.

And Aunt Theodosia is a widow still, and has been heard to say, in an unguarded moment, that Mr. Titmarsh had treated her abominably.

That gentleman is travelling with Marshall on the Continent in search of health. We see his name in the paper from time to time as guest to persons of the very highest consideration, and Pink May has been observed surreptitiously cutting out these announcements, and in the depths of her soul is (we think) firmly convinced that his admiration for her-

self caused his indifference to Aunt Theodosia's charms.

But we are of opinion that for the present his pockets are too comfortably lined with our money to make it necessary to saddle himself with an old wife.

CHAPTER IX.

"A flower in the dew,
Sweet was its smell and bonnie was its hue,
And the longer it blossomed, the sweeter it grew,
For the lily in the bud will be bonnier yet."

"ULLATHORNE!"

"Dick!"

I start up in amazement from my work to see before me one whom I believed to be pleasantly engaged in shooting his own coverts at the present moment.

As we grip hands, his eyes fall on Green Sleeves, who had been sitting by me as I worked, and who has now risen and stands before him.

If the past year has brought little change to me, it has brought much to my Lady Green Sleeves, who is a child no longer, nor yet a woman, but just a young thing with the innocence of the one, and the budding promise of the other, and I don't think that on God's earth you could find a prettier, more moving sight than this; pure, fresh, unworn, with its innocent lips that have tasted neither of fierce pain nor fiercer joy, and its future a blank page upon which will be written just what the man she shall

love pleases, no one sure could see such an one and not breathe a hope for her happiness.

"Why, Green Sleeves!" I cry, "have you forgotten your old friend, Ullathorne?"

But it is more as strangers than old friends that they meet, and when she has gone away, Ullathorne's face, pale even to haggardness, fixes my attention.

"Anything wrong, old fellow? Hetty — the child?"

"Quite well—Hetty gay as ever," he says, absently.

"But what on earth brings you to town in September and with a houseful of people?"

"The Hungerfords are there—Sir Peter will take my place. I've come up to town, Dick, about *you*."

"Has Hetty found a new heiress for me? or do you mean to try once more to inveigle me down for the shooting?"

"Neither—we've given up both notions long ago. It's something practicable this time. Dick, would you like to earn five thousand pounds?" His question strikes my ears like a thunder-clap. Five thousand pounds—a third of the price of Sieviking—is he mad, or am I dreaming? Humanly speaking, I cannot hope to have saved that sum after a score of years of toil and struggle. . . .

"You jest," I say, turning aside. "What I should like, is not what I can do. You are trying to help

me in some way, Ullathorne, but I said my last word to you on that subject long ago."

"I said 'earn,' Dick—but listen. A lad, heir to vast possessions, has fallen into bad hands; the only chance of saving him is to get him out of the country, and keep him there for four or five years, or till he has acquired sense. The father came to me yesterday in despair—did I know of anyone who, at almost a moment's notice, would take charge of him—some one not too old, or the lad would break away to other companionship, but steady, firm—in short, old fellow, *yourself*, of whom, of course, I instantly thought. He offers a thousand a year, and your expenses."

"Let me think," I say, walking up and down, "my second year at St. Saviour's is just up—that's lucky, but these five years abroad, except for information irregularly acquired, will be so much dead loss, and throw me back five years in the profession. On my return, I shall have to enter as a third-year's man—but five years of work would never bring me five thousand pounds. Thank you Ullathorne, with all my soul, and, *yes*."

"There's not much time to lose. I must telegraph to the old man at once, can you start the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"You'll see Florizel abroad?"

"I suppose so."

There is a pause, in which Green Sleeve's laugh sounds overhead.

"I want to say something to you, old fellow, and I don't know how."

"Say it out," I cry, throwing my arm over his shoulder; "we've been friends too long to begin quarrelling now." (O! my friend, my ain friend, who to-day art more to me than all other men and women upon earth, why didst thou send me from thee to come back to thee as I departed, never again?)

"Sieviking," he says, "you've kept so straight up to the present time, been so completely master of yourself, that my warning will very likely sound like presumption, especially as, though I am your elder, you have always led me, not I you."

"No, no," I cry, breaking in; "it is I who have looked up to you. The benefits have been all on my side; you have given all, and taken nothing——"

"Dick," he says, abruptly, "there is only one unselfish aspect in my love for you—it is in sending you away, for the best part of my life goes with you."

Alas! that I should leave him to the influence that, stronger than mine, is to fill his life, as later one will arise over me, compared with which his is

as nothing; that never again, all in all to each other, shall we two stand as we stand to-day. . . .

"What is this mighty business that you are trying to get off your mind?" I say, turning aside. "Are you afraid I'm not steady enough to take charge of the lad? Come yourself and take care of the pair of us!"

"I'm not thinking of him, but of you. Dick, have you ever noticed how a man, who has gone straight as a die, whether to hounds or through life, up to a certain point, all at once comes a fearful cropper, that he never gets over to the end of his days?"

"I have seen it," I say, slowly, "but speaking of life—I should not call it a fall—that implies something unexpected; the man's whole life and training led up to the moment of the temptation, whatever it might be, and the result was perfectly easy and natural, long foreseen of himself, if not by others. Tell me," I add half jestingly, "what do you fear for me?"

"That with all your fine, even splendid, chances of life, Dick, you'll make some crowning mistake in it—as I did," he adds, below his breath.

"And the cause of the mistake?"

"A woman. Who else?"

"Why, old fellow," I say, staring at him, "my

heart has never beat the faster for a woman yet—I never think of one in any shape or form——"

"Dick," he says, quietly; "what women have you seen yet, save those of your own family — and Florizel?"

"I have *seen* plenty—but as to coming under their influence—that's another matter. How is a woman to become so dangerous to me?"

"Either through your loving her too much or too little."

"Some special woman, of course?"

"No; the special one is she whom you must marry. Widely different women would be equally fatal to you—a good woman even might make your misery as completely as a bad one."

"Then I vow I'll never fall in love at all," I say, carelessly; "warn me against avarice, bitterness of spirit, pride—but against woman! It's a sheer waste of breath."

"Would you consider a man to be in the full possession of his faculties when one-half of them slept, Dick?"

"If those that are awake suffice him for use, why should he desire the rest?"

"That would be to exist, not live—and though hitherto yours has been the life of an ascetic, there will come a time when your passions, as yet a sealed book to you, will rise and sweep all before them—

and with the woman who calls them forth in all their gigantic strength will rest the happiness or the failure of your life——"

"Ullathorne," I cry, startled; "what is this?—what has put such ideas into your head?"

"I don't know," he says, passing his hand across his forehead; "you had an instinct for me once—I seem to have the same for you now. I dread your falling under one of two influences abroad—either under Florizel's, which will never satisfy you, being purely intellectual, or a new one, compared with which the former will be as child's play, and which comes to most men once in a life time—and I have a strong reason for dreading both."

"And that is?"

"Because I see in the far-off future, happiness for you in a union in which your nature will be satisfied through and through—if nothing come between now and then to make it impossible."

"My profession is my wife, Ullathorne, as Sieviking is my sweetheart."

"Stay, Dick—a word more. There is one other way in which you may come to grief—through the very nobility and thoroughness of your nature."

"Noble—thorough—" I cry, laughing bitterly; "how little after all these years you know me! Some day perhaps your character and mine may

come to be tested by each other, and you will see how infinitely grander, finer—pshaw! we are bandying compliments, as though we were enemies. After all, you may be right, and I *shall* come to hopeless grief—but it will be no fall, friend, mind that."

"Dick, do you ever look at yourself in the glass?"

"Once a day."

"What do you see there?"

"A fool—as Seneca said when he looked in his."

"I see something very different—that I never saw in a man's yet unless his life was to be out of the common way—not a look of doom, but a foreshadowing of something intense—whether of joy or sorrow God alone knows!"

"I lost my careless look of youth and happiness when I lost Sieviking," I say, abruptly; "it changed my whole nature—*hardened* me. But Fate wreaked all her spite upon me in that one blow—nothing worse can ever befal me than that; and already, thanks to you, I'm in a fair way of reversing it. Five thousand pounds—its glitter shines your words down, Ullathorne—I can think of nothing else; let me go and tell the girls."

"Stay," cries Ullathorne; "it will come upon them as a shock——"

But, dazzled to the pitch of blindness by the golden certainties in my grasp, I go straight upstairs and into the room where Jill and Green Sleeves are sitting.

"I have good news for you, girls," I cry; "I am going away the day after to-morrow for four or five years!"

Ah, me! what are we, even the best of us, that women should love and cling to us so? My selfish joy smites me keenly as a two-edged sword when I see the pallor as of death that gathers on my two dear girls' faces.

"*Dick!*"

It is Jill who speaks—Green Sleeves is dumb, with that in her brown eyes which might bring tears to my own.

"The years will soon pass," I say, looking from one to the other, while Ullathorne, his back turned to us, stares out of window, "and I shall come back quite rich, girls, well on the road to winning back Sieviking. You wouldn't have me throw away such a chance as that?"

The intensity of the moment has passed—we are able to talk, to discuss the future, to make all necessary plans, for the time is short, within three days I must be prepared to start.

But presently I discover that Green Sleeves has slipped away, and we see her no more to-day.

On the morrow all is business and hurry; Ullathorne insists on remaining in town till I go, and does everything for me that a friend can. There are but two evenings before my departure, and strangely hushed and sweet, even solemn, are these evening hours when, in the old parlour, we four sit together, saying little, counting as a miser does his gold the hours that are left us to be with one another.

It is late when, on the last night, Ullathorne leaves us; he will be here again betimes on the morrow to speed me on my way—a sharper pang than any that has assailed me yet pierces my heart, as in parting with him to-night I realize that for some years I shall be deprived of the companionship that for the past two years has formed the best part of my life.

Pink May is absent in the country on a visit, taking the boys with her. I have only my two dear girls to whom to bid good night as we part on the stairs as the clock strikes one.

The house seems quiet and full of ghosts to-night . . . I feel that I would give something to hear Anak's noisy footstep and jovial voice—hark! what was that?

Somewhere, far away,—it savours more of second sight than of actual hearing—I seem to hear the sound of weeping.

I must have slept, and wakened again, for there is a glimpse of daylight in the sky; I open my door, and listen, but there is no sound abroad. Through Jill's door, ajar, I hear her even breathing, behind that of Charolais, fast shut, there is utter silence.

I dress myself, and go downstairs, convinced that imagination has led me astray; but on the threshold of my den I pause, for within, I hear the sound of such passionate weeping as I never heard or dreamed of, from human lips before.

I softly push the door open, and the daylight that struggles in on the empty table, the cleared bookcases, all the cheerless signs of the impending desertion of a well-loved haunt, shows also a slight figure lying along the ground, with outstretched arms clasped fast about my chair.

O! my God, how she weeps! How the child must suffer, suffer always, with such a heart as this! I stoop, and, loosing her arms from about the chair, take her in my own, and seek to soothe her, as I never sought to soothe any other creature, having perhaps influence over, and love from, no one in such excess as this one poor child.

"O! Mr. Dick, Mr. Dick," she cries, between the sobs that tear her slender body in pieces, "it is not too late to change your mind now — don't go — don't go!"

"But I shall come back, my little Green Sleeves, my heart," I say, smoothing the brown hair from her brow; "have we not talked a hundred times of what we will do when I have won back Sieviking, and how many years of toil would it not take me to save up five thousand pounds?"

"Something bad will come to you," she says, clinging to my hand; "something *here* tells me you are going away for evil, not good. If you come back, you will not be my Mr. Dick ever any more."

"Green Sleeves," I say, gravely, "is not your grief selfish, less for me than for yourself?"

"No," she says, weeping, still in that slow, terrible way; "if it were for your good I could bear it, but I know that it is not, and some day you will know it, too."

"Some day, Green Sleeves, when we are all happy at Sieviking, you will look back and laugh at these fears."

"That day will never come," she says, shivering, and turning paler than before; "Mr. Dick, *don't go*."

"You will be grown up by the time I come back, Green Sleeves; your hair will be fastened up, and——"

"You will not come back," she says, trembling; "you will not come back *once* in all these years?"

"Probably not. You will be over twenty, child; quite old."

"I won't grow more than I can help," she says, a rueful little figure, half slipping off my knee with my hand held fast between both hers, and pressed against her breast; "so that I may still be your little girl—you'll never call anyone Green Sleeves but me, will you, Mr. Dick?"

"Never."

"I'll take care of the old room," she says, with a heavy sigh; "and the pickles"—she glances at a distant shelf that contains an odd assortment of bottles—"I'm sorry I said I hated them so, and they're not so very nasty when you get used to them, and the boys shan't play tricks with the microscope, and—Mr. Dick!"

"Yes!"

"Will you see Lady Florizel abroad?"

"Very likely."

"Then you and she will be married," says Green Sleeves, the tears running down her cheeks; "and she will *never* let me sit with you, or be your little girl again."

"Don't you like her, Green Sleeves?"

"Yes," says the child, after a moment's miserable reflection; "but she does not like *me*. I heard her say to you—that day she came down here, and I

was sitting beside you as you worked—'Why is not that child at school?' But you couldn't have got on without me, could you, Mr. Dick?"

"No," I answer, fondly smoothing the dark rings of hair from the childish face; "but I'm not going to be married to anybody, little one—I have only one love, and that's Sieviking."

"Mr. Dick, can you keep a secret?" This, after a few moments of anxious study of my face.

"I'll try."

"And you'll promise not to laugh?"

"I promise."

"Well, then, *I'm* going to do something to win back Sieviking, too. I'm going"—in a tone of triumph—"to write a book."

"What about, Green Sleeves?"

"Never you mind; but I mean to get a lot of money for it—all for Sieviking. It will help to pass the time till you come back," she goes on, wistfully; "I shall sit in your very own chair, and sometimes shut my eyes hard, and make belief I am *you*."

The room is full of daylight now; above stairs there is a stir of life; hard by, Ariel goes to and fro. Each familiar sound strikes sadly on my ears. How many long years will pass before I hear them again?

I draw Green Sleeves into my arms; with a sigh, her head droops forward on my shoulder; worn out by her lonely vigil, the child sleeps.

Breakfast is prepared, grows cold, but still she sleeps. Ullathorne is here; the moment of departure has come, but she still sleeps on. I lay her down gently at last on the old sofa, and kiss her on the lips . . . would to God I could bring back to thee, my little one, that innocent kiss, the first, last pure one I gave thee!

O! simple, happy home—never simple or unhaunted to me again—why did I leave you for lust of gold?

"Ullathorne," I say, hoarsely, as we drive away, Jill's anguished farewell over, "come and see them sometimes; try to cheer them up a bit—I leave them in your hands."

A fatal charge—what madness impels me to it?

"There is no danger now," he mutters below his breath; then, aloud, "ay, I will go, Dick—sometimes. Heavens! how some day that child will—*love*."

END OF VOL. I.

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My lady green sleeves

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